

ARGOSY-ALL-STORY WEEKLY

DECEMBER 15, 1923

# ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Hopalong  
Cassidy  
Returns

Clarence E.  
Mulford's

*Great Western  
Character  
appears  
again*

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COPY

DECEMBER 15

BY THE  
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# ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLVI

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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLVI

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1923

NUMBER 4



## Hopalong Cassidy Returns.

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

**I**N December, 1905, Hopalong Cassidy and his ranch mates appeared in print for the first time in the old *Outing* magazine in a story called "The Fight at Buckskin." This story established Hopalong and his friends, and was followed by more, which later came out in book form as "Bar-20." Other series of Bar-20 tales ran from time to time in various magazines until over forty had been published, with never one refused. These in turn came out in book form under the titles, "Bar-20 Days" and "The Coming of Cassidy" and made hosts of readers and friends.

With this encouragement Mr. Mulford turned to the more serious form and made the characters appear in the novels "Hopalong Cassidy," "The Man from Bar-20," "Johnny Nelson," "Tex Ewalt," "The Bar-20 Three," and "Buck Peters, Ranchman." Thinking that he had used the same characters enough, Mr. Mulford left them and turned to new ones; but he found that his readers still wanted the old Bar-20 crowd. He began to get letters protesting against shelving the Bar-20 outfit, and they came from all parts of the world where English is read. His books are



published in England, Canada, Australia, New South Wales, and throughout the British Empire; and the Bar-20 books without exception are still going strong. Negotiations are now in progress for the Scandinavian rights. "Bar-20," in which the characters made their first appearance in book form, shows no let up in the demand for it, despite its eighteen years.

At first Mr. Mulford did not take the letters seriously in regard to putting the old characters to work again; but now he is setting the stage in the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY magazine for Hopalong Cassidy, the old Bar-20 leader, and his inseparable friend, Red Connors, keeping in mind that they have been growing older. To many people these characters, purely fictional, are real; episodes, existing only in the imagination of the author, have been recognized by some readers as actual occurrences. One ranchman in Arizona refused point blank to believe that Mr. Mulford had not been at one time a member of his outfit, thoroughly well acquainted with every man in it, and with every part of his ranch. He based his statements on certain things which he read in "Hopalong Cassidy," and is not convinced of his error to this day. Another man in the West wrote for "Shorty's" present address, evidently recognizing an old acquaintance posing under a different name in one of Mr. Mulford's stories. He explained that he understood the wisdom of keeping "Shorty" incognito. On being told the truth he refused to believe it, and asked the author to forward a letter from him to "Shorty," if he would not tell where "Shorty" was to be found. Naturally, Mr. Mulford could not do this, and repeated his former statements; but they were not believed, and his correspondent became vexed. The letters grew hot, and Mr. Mulford dropped the correspondence.

The new Hopalong Cassidy series, which is superior to anything that Mr. Mulford has ever written along similar lines, will contain ten stories, all of which will appear in the pages of this magazine. Whether or not the characters are alive or dead or ever existed, is of little importance; a million readers accept them for their worth and are delighted that they appear in print and work out their romantic and adventuresome destinies.

"The Snakes" is the opening installment of the series and follows herewith.  
THE EDITOR.

## I—THE SNAKES

"WE ain't crossin' no desert!" snapped Red, with an emphasis which is safe only when used with friends. "We ain't even got this south visit over yet; it 'll be near a month when we start back for th' SV, but yo're itchin' for speed already! Th' whole summer an' part of th' fall will be ahead of us. You only made up yore mind three hours ago to ride north, an' now yo're worryin' because we ain't halfway there! I allus said you was a damn fool!"

"Montanny's a long way off," rejoined Hopalong, doggedly.

"Tain't no further off from here than this place was from Montanny!" countered Red, glaring. "Comin' down from th' railroad last year, you made us cross that blasted desert because you itched to see Johnny agin: what th' devil you itchin' about now?"

Hopalong looked off to one side, the lines of his weather-beaten, sun-browned, wind-toughened face deepening, and into his eyes came an expression that was pitiful. He could see two graves on a wind-swept Montana hillside—a large grave and a small one. He gulped, and his companion's side-wise glance saw the Adam's apple rise and fall.

Red shook his head sadly and looked straight in front, wondering if he ever could get his friend's thoughts off the loss which had changed him so. To lose one's wife and child—he bit his lip: he had a wife and a bright-eyed little girl up there in Montana, whom he had not seen for a year; and it had been his secret hope that his girl and Hopalong Cassidy's mischievous boy—but it was all done with now.

For many years, ever since Red had returned from the Texas gulf-coast range

with supplies so necessary to the little Bar-20 ranch just beginning its existence on Snake Creek, and found Hopalong Cassidy getting out of trouble, the two had shared a friendship which nothing ever had cooled. Again and again each had risked his own life for the other; they had shared privations, dangers, hunger and thirst together; many times they had, side by side, looked death in the eye and told it to go to hell; mutual sacrifices had been nearly as common as the day's work. This friendship had been their religion; the sacrifices, the solemn rites.

Neither had ever told the other in words that he was anything more than a mangy coyote or a cross-eyed cow thief, knowing both to be lies; never had either assured the other of his friendship, and their verbal endearments had taken the form of abuse; but God help any outsider who borrowed a leaf from that book!

For the last year Red had ridden close herd on his friend, forsaking all others to ride doggedly and unquestioningly at the side of the man who had lost so much. Gradually Hopalong's steady dejection had faded, and he was beginning to show signs of becoming his old self, although Red was not fool enough to believe that the reversal would be anywhere near complete. At times there came a look on his friend's face that told Red that no matter how little Hopalong had feared death in the old days, he feared it much less now; and once in a while the look said more than that, and Red stuck to him like a shadow. Now that they had decided to return to Montana after their visit to the old Bar-20 ranch and its neighborhood, Red was beginning to wonder what the end of that long trail would do for his friend. He plainly could see those two graves on the hillside.

The bobbing Adam's apple sent Red back into one of his old stand-bys, and he continued his growling about deserts, an old bone of contention between them.

"Nothin' but lizards, Gilas, horned toads, side-winders an' th' like has got any use for a desert; but you ain't got sense enough to know when you're well off! 'Tain't that you're gettin' childish; hell, you was *allus* that way!"

"If I had yore disposition—" began Hopalong with warming interest.

"It 'd be plumb ruined by now!" interrupted Red.

"I'd go hang myself," continued Hopalong. "You can kick up more damn fuss about a little desert than any man I ever knowed!"

"Why wouldn't I?" demanded Red, glaring. "For near twenty years you've knowed I hate a desert worse'n I do a boss thief, but for near twenty years you ain't been happy unless you was draggin' me over one! If there's any in these United States that you ain't fried me on it's only because you ain't never heard tell of it! You've even drug me into Mexico, an' fried me there! I'm tellin' you we ain't crossin' no deserts we can ride around: that's flat!"

"Flat as yore head!" retorted Hopalong. He glanced at the repeating Winchester in his friend's saddle scabbard, and sneered.

Red looked at the huge, single-shot Sharps in Hopalong's saddle sheath, and snorted.

"Huh!" said Hopalong.

"Huh!" said Red.

After a ride in pugnacious silence, Hopalong grunted and cleared his throat.

"Mebby we're a pair of fools to ride back to th' old ranch," he said. "It 'll be terrible changed. There'll be wire fences, irrigatin' ditches, dams, railroads, schoolhouses an' churches. It 'll mebbly make us sick."

"We usually are a pair of fools when we're together," replied Red. "Reckon we'll find any of th' old crowd on th' other ranches?"

"Don't know; but we got to go an' find out."

"What's th' cow country comin' to, anyhow?" demanded Red, with feeling.

"To a better land," answered Hopalong, thoughtfully. "Might as well be honest about it, much as it hurts. It's crops, an' towns an' schoolhouses that make a country; but it shore is an awful dose to swaller. Times are changin', Red: we're outa step."

Red's amazement at his friend's calm acceptance of what was to him a calamity was too much for words.

"You hear a lot of bellerin' from old-time cowmen about th' good old days bein' gone forever," continued Hopalong. "They were good old days, for cowmen, an' they done their part. They had to be; an' they had to go. Of course it 'll be a long time before th' open range is all gone. Th' edges 'll go first, an' along th' streams an' railroads. It's th' last that 'll count, an' count fast. It would take a long time for th' farmers to work through th' cow country if they could only inch in from th' edges; but now that they're workin' both ways in th' middle of th' range, from three, four railroads, it 'll move fast. You don't reckon I'd 'a' let William, Jr., grow up to be a cow-puncher, do you, if he'd lived?"

Red muffled a curse. There it was again: swinging back to the one thought uppermost. Hopalong had taken delight in looking forward to the training of his son, to making an upstanding man out of him. He had molded Johnny Nelson into a man who was a credit to any community, and he had been anxious to mold his son into another. Red changed the subject.

"When we get through down South an' get back to th' SV, are we stayin' very long with Johnny, or pushin' right on?"

"We'll stay a day or two," replied Hopalong, his face clouding. Johnny Nelson was very close to his heart. "Funny how a man changes his mind. When we left Montanny last year for th' SV, I figured I could spend th' rest of my days there. Huh! Red, do you know that we're just a couple of tramps? Respectable, an' above stealin' an' heggin': hut tramps, just th' same? What chance has a breed like ourn got, that's allus rollin' on, to hold th' range ag'in' a hunch like nesters, that settle down an' take root? We're tramps. We're likewise a pair of fools. Who but two fools would start from th' SV to ride hoss-back to Montanny? There's railroads, ain't there?"

Red flared. "Yes; but who'd ride on th' damn things while he had a cayuse? You know what'd happen to th' railroads if I had my way, don't you?"

Hopalong laughed. "Ain't no use bitin' me, Carrot-Top! I hate 'em worse'n you do. We admits we hate 'em; but so does

folks hate nasty medicine. They take it just th' same. Only two fools would choose cayuses an' a trail near two thousan' miles long, when they could go by train."

This was the task they had set for themselves. After their return to the SV for a few days' visit they would start for another ranch, up in Montana, where most of their old-time outfit worked for their old-time foreman, and where range conditions were more to their liking. Spring had come upon them and tempted them to make the journey on horseback, since their time was their own, and they both hated trains. To go over the old trails again, keeping spring with them part of the way, would be worth the effort; to live over in memory days that would come no more, and to review conditions already past; to test their memories of trails and old-time fords; to find dead towns which they once had known alive, and new towns where none had been. All this was a sufficient lure, and did not need the added zest of possible adventures which might be dumped out on them from fate's big bag. They had plenty of money, were accustomed to long distances in the saddle, and to hardships, and they looked forward to that ride with a keen eagerness.

"Tramps, huh?" grunted Red, scowling.

"Tramps," said Hopalong, nodding.

They topped a hill and started down the slope toward a nester's house situated in a mess of harhed wire. His land was divided into small parcels bearing different kinds of crops, and each was separated from those around it by three strands of wire. The outer, inclosing fence, was of five strands.

"Betcha he's got a barb-wire watch chain," growled Red in strong disgust.

"Betcha he's been pestered sick hy cows," chuckled Hopalong, who knew that hatred for the nester. "Still hate 'em, don't you, Carrot-Top?"

"No more'n you do!" retorted Red, savagely.

"Yes," answered his companion. "I still hate 'em, though I know I'm wrong. Hahit, I reckon. Just th' same, they're tryin' to make a livin' th' only way they know how. They're makin' th' country, an' they've come to stay."

After tying their animals a safe distance from the outer fence they headed for the house, and had to open and close three gates, all liberally strung with barbed wire. As they reached the porch they heard a hail and looked up to see a man running toward them.

"Got 'em yet?" called the nester, carefully climbing a barbed wire fence.

"Loco," grunted Hopalong.

"Most nesters are," replied Red dogmatically, looking at the fences as if they were proof of his statement. "Ever see so much wire on so little ground?"

"Did they git away?" asked the nester, climbing another fence. He paused to loosen carefully the seat of his trousers from a barb. "They oughta be wrapped in a green hide an' left in th' sun, damn 'em!"

"Lots he knows about a green hide," muttered Red.

"Heard tell about 'em, I reckon," replied his companion.

Safely over the last fence the nester hurried toward them, but stopped short a few paces away and stared at Hopalong. Then he swore softly.

"Damn! Took ye fer th' sheriff, an' a deppity! But mebby ye are?"

"Only a couple of pilgrims," said Hopalong. "Stopped to get a drink an' fill our canteens. So I look like th' sheriff, huh?"

"Dead ringer, even to yore hoss. Shore you ain't him?"

At their denial he looked a little suspicious, but his expression changed as he took in the details of their persons. They in no way resembled the descriptions of the Ferret or Janssen, and their red hair was an assurance that neither was Mesquite Jenkins. He beamed on them, and hoped if the three desperadoes paid him a visit they would do so before these craggy persons had left the premises.

"Set a while, strangers. Have a little somethin' to clear a way for th' water?"

The two friends grinned and nodded, and spoke the same words in unison.

"Don't mind if we do!"

"Wait a shake," said the host, hurrying into the house, and in a few moments he

was becoming pleasantly acquainted with his guests.

"You said somethin' about us gettin' somethin'," suggested Hopalong.

"Yeah; th' snakes that robbed Sim Porter an' killed Nancy Smithers," said the nester, and told them about the crimes. The robbery, audacious as it had been, was swept out of their minds by the brutal and revolting murder of the woman.

"She must 'a' met th' Ferret while he was escapin', an' mebby got in his way," said their host. "Her throat was cut, an' knife play is th' Ferret's long suit. They say he'll kill fer th' fun of watchin' th' blood spurt out."

The visitors' replies were appropriate, and after an hour's talk the two travelers arose and departed, following their host's directions toward the nearest water, which was Cottonwood Creek.

As they paused on the top of the ridge they smiled at the tiny pasture across the placid stream, set like a jewel between the clean sand of the creek bed and the straggling line of timber just beyond. Here was grass, water, and fuel, and here they would spend the night. The streams had been getting farther apart and they knew they were coming to the fringe of the desert stretch which already had given them a bone for their wrangling.

"Don't reckon we can improve on that," said Hopalong, scanning the pasture. "We got plenty of time, an' I feel like loafin' th' rest of th' day. Be good chance to wash up, too."

"It's mebby th' last water for a long ride," rejoined Red, scowling as he pictured the hated Staked Plain.

Hopalong smiled. "Owin' to yore bull-headed nature we ain't crossin' no desert this trip. We'll go round it. I see I gotta humor you like a baby."

"Since that nester said you looked like th' sheriff you've been all swelled up," retorted Red. "You ain't got sense enough to reckon that lookin' like th' sheriff is mebby dangerous around here right now." He sneered. "Surprised you ain't never run for sheriff."

Hopalong chuckled. "Seein' th' mess you made of th' job, besides near gettin'

married to that Wallace girl, I ain't been hankerin' for no sheriff's job."

Red flusbed. He was a married man now, but he did not marry Stell Wallace. He was glad on both counts; but the way she had led him on, and then thrown him into the discard for a preacher did not set lightly on him. This was some years before, and he had mooched around with a broken heart, fearing that it would not prove fatal, and the perspective given by the passing of time made him smart by the picture it showed him: the picture of a red beaded fool, a fool past all belief.

"Ain't you never goin' to forget nothin' that ever happened?" demanded Red, with heat. "When it comes to rakin' over damn fool things outa th' past, I got a two-hand rake of my own! Yo're th' last man on earth that wants to start any rakin', when I'm around, an' you know it! Couple more peeps outa you, an' I'll give you somethin' to listen to!"

Hopalong looked coldly into his friend's eyes.

"Some rainy day when we're back with th' rest of th' boys, I'll rake with you, an' leave it to a vote. You got a lot of gall blatin' about *yore* two-hand rake. There ain't no man on earth that's made as many fool plays as *yow* have!"

"Huh!" snorted Red, leading the way down the slope. "You look like th' sheriff! He's got my sympathy! Come on, you cow thief."

They wrangled down the hill, across the creek and while they put the camp in order, stopping only when they had run out of the more prominent reminiscences of asinine episodes; but truth compels the admission that Red dug up three to his companion's one.

Hopalong looked around the camp and then at the creek.

"Tain't deep enough to swim in," be said; "but I can get wet all over."

"Bout time, too," said Red, picking up his rifle. "I'm goin' off an' shoot somethin' to eat. Anyhow, th' crick won't be fit for me to wash in for a long time after you get through."

"Huntin', huh?" grunted Hopalong.

"It's a good thing we get plenty of grub!"

Red scorned to reply and drifted into the brush. As the best rifle shot in the Southwest he did not have to defend himself against the slurs of any man, not even the best six-gun expert he ever had seen.

Hopalong fooled around the camp, but finally undressed and went in the creek, whose waters, although very warm, felt good. He was generous in his use of the soap and tossed it up on the bank, rinsing himself well before he followed it. He was parading for the sun and the wind to dry him when a head raised behind the farther bank and a six-gun roared.

## II.

MILES away from Cottonwood Creek, Mesquite Jenkins drew back from the eager, brilliant greasewood fire and looked out across it.

"Like coyotes, we are," he growled. "Eatin' poor grub, livin' in fear of our own shadders, hangin' round th' edge of th' desert, swallerin' sand an' alkali in our eatin', drinkin' an' breathin'. I've had too damned much of it!"

The little man across from him tossed a handful of greasewood on the blaze and watched its sizzling, popping, sputtering flare.

"It's better'n Judge Lynch," he mumbled, looking at Mesquite through narrowed lids. To his face came an expression remarkably like the cunning leer of a fox, momentarily dominating his habitual expression of stark cruelty. "Our trail's two weeks old. They lost it. Give 'em another week to go back to their reg'lar jobs. This place just suits me."

Mesquite idly picked up another plant stem and tossed it on the fire, swore at its sudden stink, smelled his fingers and looked from the Ferret to Janssen. The latter's broad face was expressionless, almost stupid, for the man ran to bulk and tremendous physical strength. He was the third factor in a temporary and deadly combination, his stolid, unimaginative nature rounding out the attributes of the trio. The conversation had made little impression on him, not enough to shift his gaze from the explosive fire, from which now came a thread of

malodorous smoke, the contribution of the stinkweed.

"Yeah," drawled Mesquite. "Reckon it would suit *you*. To me it stinks like that," pointing to the poorly burning stinkweed stem. He pulled out his tobacco sack, dumped the few grains of fine, dry dust in his hand and then hurled dust and sack into the fire. "Huh! Suits *you*!" he sneered.

The Swede awkwardly tossed his own sack at Mesquite's crossed legs.

"Der's some," he grunted placidly.

Mesquite tossed it back again, his scowling face a gargoyle in the flickering firelight, but before it struck the ground the Ferret's lean hand darted out and caught it. The greediness of the motion and the look on his face deepened Mesquite's sneer, and the youngster continued:

"I'm ridin' on real soon. They couldn't 'a' got a look at our clothes in that light, an' all they can remember of our faces is th' handkerchiefs. We made a mistake, leavin' town at all. I want smokin', an' I'm goin' to get it."

The Ferret grinned, and his grin was something which Mesquite was beginning to regard with a curious and flaming hatred. It was too oily, too smirky, too ingratiatingly greasy, patently false to the real nature of the man. Mesquite knew him to be as coldly ferocious as the animal whose name he had been given, that he loved cruelty and blood as much as any member of the weasel family. Something in the youth's nature rebelled at everything the other stood for. He eyed the grin, recognized its obvious hypocrisy, and thought that the fox in his companion was becoming too plain these days. The grin was thoroughly foxlike, but the little eyes burning like coals under the sloping forehead gave it the lie. No matter what traits he might endeavor to assume, the ferret was a ferret still. Each of these men had their share of the robbery, and for some days Mesquite had detected something in the Ferret's eyes that he did not like.

"That's all right for you," cunningly replied the Ferret, serenely confident of outwitting this youth who had not yet reached twenty. "Yo're built like eight out of ten

of th' men you'll meet. There's two dozen like you in both them towns. You could 'a' slipped into th' line-up at any bar an' been safe. Janssen an' me couldn't. There ain't another man hereabouts that looks like either of us. Where you aimin' to ride to?"

"Johnsville," answered Mesquite, "an' then I'm goin' on to a ranch—alone!"

"Yohnsville ban best," grunted Janssen.

"Sheriff's just as likely to be there as at Cactus," said the Ferret, his beady eyes sparkling with a sudden thought. His gun-fighting companion, banking on his average stature, overlooked one thing, and that was enough to hang him. Even during his short stay in the town he had been identified with the seven-foot Swede and the little wizened man; and both the latter had been glimpsed in their get-away. They had left town by different directions, and met again when well beyond it; but the Ferret had let his lust for killing turn a robbery into something which had aroused the whole country to a pitch of rage beyond all precedent. This his companions did not know, and he dared not tell them; but he was overjealous of the secret, overalert to keep it hidden, so suspicious of careless words and looks that he had aroused a feeling of distrust in the youth.

This had grown steadily and rapidly. There was another factor that widened the breach: these three men, so entirely unsuited to each other for constant association, had been uninterruptedly together for too long a time; and little things which would have called for a laugh in the companionship of others now threatened to become deadly.

Mesquite looked at the little man calmly, provocatively, restraining the annoying urge of his wizard gun hand. During their swift and hard pressed flight, their twistings and turnings, and the cunningly contrived doubling under the lead of the Ferret which had brought them to safety under the very noses of their enemies; during the idle loafing in this desert hiding place within a day's ride of either town, where they had rested while the posses searched farther afield—during all this time Mesquite had felt his gorge rising, and knew that if he remained in the other's company another

day a quarrel would flare up like the eager flames of a greasewood fire and end in swift death to one or both.

"They must 'a' been mad as hell to chase us like they did," commented Mesquite thoughtfully. "Seemed like it was somethin' personal, somethin' pizen an' desperate, in every man of 'em. I could feel it!"

The Ferret closed his eyes for a moment and then opened them to grin again, and he held the grin unchanged while the expression of the youth's face made him vibrate with the feeling of quick, close danger. He estimated the distance across the little fire, but found the other's eyes riveted to his own, and he dropped the lids to mask the lust that blazed in them.

"I can mebbly explain that," he said, chuckling to keep the other's animosity from crystallizing into a sudden exposition of deadly sleight-of-hand. He had a vast and wondering respect for the youth's draw, which baffled sight; and he knew the gunman to be swaying perilously toward an overt act. It never would do to chance another day with him; he must be killed while he slept.

"Yeah?" drawled Mesquite softly, almost caressingly. Unknowingly, he was deliberately imitating, so far as he knew, a man he had never seen.

"Yes. We took it off Sim Porter, with his outfit close by. It was a personal loss, an' a personal insult."

"Huh!" muttered Mesquite doubtfully. "I dunno. They was deadly as wolves. I could feel th' hatred in th' air. Janssen, what you think?"

The Swede puffed calmly at his reeking pipe, and took a long time to consider it, turning it over and over in his mind; then he shook his head. "Ay tank you talk words—yust vords."

The Ferret sneered. "Any meanin' that ain't two-plus-two would sound like words, an' nothin' else, to *him*. That was too subtle for Janssen."

"Ya-as, maype; but Ay ban feel fooney w'en Ay tank about das chase," said Janssen hopelessly, helplessly and awkwardly. "Ay don't know yust how to say it."

Mesquite's glance had flashed from the Ferret to the Swede and back again, his gun hand bothering him, his whole body tingling with suspicion and hostility. The Ferret's lids narrowed again, and the gleam in the weazel eyes was cold and stark. They peered out through the merest slits to baffle the gunman's searching gaze. It must be plain indeed if Janssen felt it!

For half a minute the two stared at each other across the noisy fire, one trying to read, the other to keep him from doing it. Mesquite's eyes were wide open, frankly suspicious and accusing, for he was so intent on his visual inquiries that he forgot to hide what he should have hidden. From the Ferret's eyes only the reflected glint from the flickering fire told that he was watching the gunman, watching almost breathlessly. The guilty knowledge of a damnably atrocious murder did not bother him of itself; but the crime seemed to be spreading through the darkness and calling out his guilt. For days he had not been able to act naturally, and the more he had tried to do so, the more he had failed.

Mesquite appeared to relax, but the Ferret was too cunning to be caught like that, and he only smiled. His own speed of hand for knife throwing was known to his companions, and in the Mesquite's wariness he read that knowledge and a deep respect for his deadliness. Then the gunman slowly and clumsily arose from his cross-legged position, but not for an instant did he allow himself to get into a posture which would cramp or interfere with his draw. The Ferret still smiled, a cold sneer flickering about his pale, thin lips.

He watched Mesquite pick up his saddle and step farther and farther back into the encircling gloom, until at last only his cheek bones greasily reflected the light of the fire. During that slow retreat the Ferret, frozen by the knowledge that every added foot operated in favor of the gun as against the knife; rigid with the knowledge that to move, to speak, even to change the expression on his face, might instantly crystallize the gunman's thoughts into precipitate and eye-baffling action; knowing that he made a fair target, picked out of the darkness by the firelight, and one the other would

not miss; knowing that he was standing in the Open Door, he sat immovable, his face set, his chest barely rising and falling. And as he sat there like a statue a cold rage was flooding him from scalp to toes. For this strain and torment he some day would take full payment.

Janssen, hulking huge in the light of the hissing fire, felt uncomfortable without knowing why, and shifted his position as he looked curiously after the departing gunman. He turned up the collar of his coat, wriggled in his loose clothing, and reached his great, thick hands toward the blaze. The chill of the desert's night air seemed to have increased swiftly in the last few minutes.

"Ay han colt," he growled. "T'row on some greasewood, Yiminy. It burns like tinder."

The Ferret ignored him, scarcely heard him, and kept his position unchanged. The light on the cheek bones had died out, but still he did not move. There came the tinkle of a cinch ring striking other metal, a leathery creak, and then milling hoofs, but the darkness bid all movement. Then the gunman's voice reached the two at the fire. It was harsh, dry, strained.

"So-long, Janssen."

"Vat you mean?" asked the Swede in surprise. "You ban go away, Mesquite?"

He listened for an answer, but it did not come. When the sounds of the horse died away, he turned to his companion, and then squinted at the beads of sweat standing out on the sloping forehead. The Ferret's face glistened with moisture.

"Yiminy! An' Ay han feel colt!"

"Comin' or stayin'?" suddenly demanded the Ferret, bounding to his feet. With Mesquite roaming in the darkness there would be no sleep for the little man that night, unless he shifted. He still tingled with apprehension, any moment fearing a shot.

"Vat?" asked Janssen, astonished. He felt of the tobacco sack in his pocket, and glanced at the scanty pile of provisions at the edge of the firelight. "T'ought ve was goin' to stay here a vile more?"

"Did you?" grunted the Ferret, his mind on other things. He wiped a sleeve across

his face and glared into the night. "You damned hig fool!" he snarled as the meaning of the words crept through a rift in his thoughts. "You've been looking death in the face an' didn't have brains enough to know it! Meet you a month from to-night at the cabin!" An evil grin twisted his face. "Mesquite won't hother us if he goes to either of them towns. He's near as dumb as you!" He whirled around and left the fire.

"I stay here a vile yet, vere's it safe," said Janssen, blinking at the fire. He heard the swift departure of another horse, and was alone on the desert. Emptying his stinking pipe he reached for his blankets, ready to spend the rest of the night in deep and tranquil sleep. "Vere it's safe," he grunted as he smuggled down.

The desert chill grew swiftly as the fire shrank, but there remained enough of the flickering light to glisten sinuously on something which moved sluggishly from the east to the west along the ground; a steely, flexible length of reflected light, traveling with a peculiar, sidewise motion toward the blanket swathed bulk near the fire, where a gratifying animal beat could be found. Reaching the sleeping man the glistening streak moved back and forth along the blanket, and then slowly flowed around the upper end as the weak fire died out altogether.

The sleeper stirred, fumbled clumsily at something coiled on his laboring chest, then screamed curses and clutched the writhing sidewinder with viselike hands. Again and again and again a flattened, ovate bead struck viciously at the only bare skin within its reach, under which pumped the swiftly coursing jugular stream, a stream now loaded with jet after jet of venom.

### III.

MESQUITE was halfway to Johnsville when day broke, and the coming of light seemed to clarify the doubts in his mind. This was the direct way to the SV ranch, and he had ridden three hundred miles so far to get to that ranch. He had let himself get cleaned out at poker when he had put up for the night in Johnsville, and bad



been forced to stay there several days in hope of recouping some of his losses; and necessity had thrown him in with two recent companions. They saw that he did not starve, and they got him in their debt; and then, when they judged the time to be ripe, had argued him into acting as lookout while they "turned a trick." He was no moralist, he had no experience to draw upon, and the money had been obtained easily, and pointed out the way of obtaining more. Only his determination to visit a ranch he never had seen, and the personality of the Ferret had caused him to break away from his two partners in crime.

He followed a rock ridge to where it cut across the Cactus-Johnsville trail, thus leaving no tracks, and swung along the main highway, the prints of his horse lost in a multitude of others. The trail dipped into a deep arroyo and twisted up the other bank, passing a narrow gully at an angle. Caution made him go on foot up the east bank to see if any travelers were in sight, and not a quarter of a mile from him rode two men whom he knew at a glance; the sheriff and a deputy.

Mesquite slipped back to his horse, led it carefully into the gully and scattered dry leaves over the faint tracks. Then he hid himself and waited for the riders to pass by.

They came steadily nearer and soon he could make out their words.

"Don't know his name," said the sheriff. "Never saw him before he showed up in town a couple days before th' robbery. Didn't take much notice of him, but some of th' boys did. Ain't no doubt he was in it. He was hangin' round with th' Ferret an' Janssen, an' when they disappeared, he disappeared."

"Wonder if he had a hand in butcherin' Nancy Smithers?" queried the deputy.

"That was th' Ferret's work!" snapped the sheriff. "He's off his head when it comes to usin' a knife. Nobody but him would 'a' killed a harmless woman, or butchered her like that if he did kill her. No matter what I do with th' other two if I get 'em, I know what I'll do with th' Ferret. Lemme get my—"

Mesquite strained to hear the rest of it,

but the words had become too faint. He caressed the handle of his gun, the Ferret's evil face in his mind. From what he had heard of their careless talk about their cabin rendezvous he had a pretty shrewd idea of where it lay. He waited until it was safe to leave his hiding place and then rode rapidly away, eager to do the sheriff's work for him, and to that extent ease his own feelings.

For three days he rode hard, covering his trail by every trick he knew, and despite his youthfulness he knew plenty of them. Experience would perfect them, but they would serve him in his present need. He made use of three creeks and several great stretches of rocky ground, and now he felt secure from any pursuit. There would be nothing to fear for another day, and then he would need all his wits against a man old in experience, and filled with animal cunning. When Cottonwood Creek was reached he would have to watch for the Ferret, supposedly ahead of him.

The Ferret was not ahead of him, for he was too cunning to lead the way to the cabin and have a deadly enemy on his trail. The Ferret did not believe that the youngster was stupid enough to ride in the direction of Johnsville, and had taken the remark as having been made to throw him off; so he circled wide and killed time until assured that Mesquite was well on his way. The gunman, not knowing the exact or even approximate location of the cabin, would have to hunt for it, and the Ferret would settle matters to his own satisfaction. When the little man swung in the direction of his rendezvous with the Swede, intending to lay low there until the other arrived, he wasted no effort in trying to pick up the gunman's trail, knowing this to be useless for a while: he knew where the trail would lead.

The Ferret pushed on at a steady lope, which he would hold until he came to the upper reaches of Cottonwood Creek. From there on he would use the coyote cunning which had made him famous, or infamous, depending on the viewpoint.

Cottonwood Creek was still half a day's ride when Mesquite accidentally came to a tiny spring under a mass of bowlders, the

shrinking waters of which were sucked up by the sand before they had gone a hundred yards. He was tired, his horse was tired, and he knew the value of a rest where horseflesh was concerned. Swinging from the saddle he stripped it off, picketed the horse to graze on the scanty grass about the wetted sand and prepared a fire of dry wood, whose tenuous column of smoke would broadcast no warning to hostile eyes. A small frying pan and a coffee pot made the total of his culinary equipment, and both soon were resting on the blaze.

The Ferret's empty canteen warned him to consider mileage, and the warning was given added weight by the condition of his mount.

Cottonwood Creek lay a full day's ride to the southwest, but half a day's ride more to the east was Bowlder Spring, not known to many. It would take him to a good noon camp, and from it on to the creek was but half a day's travel.

There was no reason save instinctive caution that made the little man scout about before he rode up to the spring, but as on many previous occasions the caution saved him. To his surprise he saw the gunman sitting cross-legged before his cunning fire, calmly eating and drinking. The Ferret's beady eyes glinted and a ghastly grin played on his face. Here was luck! Here was his quarry open to his attack, unsuspecting, placidly eating. Here was food, water, plunder; here was revenge and the assurance of future safety! It was like a draft of cold air to a fevered brow. Should he return to his horse for his rifle, or allow himself the pleasure given by his favorite weapon? This he decided quickly.

The Ferret slipped among the bowlders, working closer and closer to his victim with the stealth and cunning of a predatory cat. Foot by foot, yard by yard, he advanced, down wind of the grazing horse and secure from its curiosity. He fixed his eyes on a ledge rising up the height of a man behind a bulwark of bowlders, the space between the two forming a natural trench. From that spot he could throw hard and true. He fixed his gaze on the base of Mesquite's neck and in his mind's eye he could see the pulsing jugular under the skin; but

he did not make the mistake of looking too long and steadily. He had known men to be warned by a steady gaze.

With infinite patience he approached the ledge, all his interest on the fire, gained it and crouched behind the wall of rocks, peering through an interstice at the unsuspecting youngster not thirty feet away. He set his feet solidly, the right foot a step to the rear; he tensed himself, swinging the right side and shoulder back, his right arm going out behind. In his hand lay the heavy throwing knife, its point and double edge razor keen.

Mesquite leaned over to reach for the coffee pot, his head for a moment turned away, and in that moment the Ferret straightened out of his crouch and his upraised hand reached swiftly backward over the rim of the ledge to poise for the briefest instant; but something streaked to meet it from the hot sand above, and the driving fangs hung in the flesh, so deeply had they been driven. Even this shock did not stop the motion already begun, and the hand flashed forward, but flashed wildly, without aim or direction, and from the thrower's throat came an exclamation of terror.

Mesquite whirled and shot like a streak of light, dropped the smoking gun into its holster and hurried toward the bowlders and the ledge, not for one moment doubting the sureness of his aim. He rolled the body over with a contemptuous, careless foot and then ducked back with a strangled curse: the flashing head had barely missed him. He drew his gun and was about to kill the snake when he checked himself. His mental picture of that open mouth did not show the fangs, and he looked down at the outflung hand near his feet. Two fangs, their points embedded in the metacarpals, gave him the explanation.

"Much obliged, Wriggly," he grunted, bowing to the coiled reptile, whose whirling rattles now whirled a lie, and he turned back to finish his meal, chuckling with satisfaction.

#### IV.

Hopalong, standing on the bank of the creek, gasped and staggered, vaguely conscious of a shot close by. The dogged per-

sistence and grim courage which had emblazoned his name high throughout the Southwest sent him reeling into the thicket, hardly knowing what he was doing. First he must get out of sight and then try for his guns.

On the other side of the creek, Mesquite held up a smoking six-gun, cursing the nervous horse that had made him shoot high, and the persistence of his pursuers. How had they figured he would pass this way? Had they captured Janssen and made him talk? Had they learned about the cabin, and figured he would head for it? He had no doubt that the man he had just shot was Sheriff Dutton: the man's face was not the only thing, for his limp, and the horse grazing near the creek would admit of no doubt. Mesquite cursed this unexpected danger so close to him when he had believed himself secure from any pursuit, and he whirled his tired horse and spurred away, desperately anxious to get a start on the deputies.

Ordinarily Red Connors would have paid slight attention to a shot, but to his mind came what he had heard from the nester. Ten minutes after the report had died away, Red pushed through the brush and entered the camp.

"Here, Red," answered Hopalong, dragging himself from the thicket. "Creased me. Shot without warnin', cold an' deliberate. Never mind me: get that ——! I tell you I'm all right: get him!"

"Told you lookin' like a sheriff was sometimes dangerous!" growled Red, picking up his friend and carrying him to a little sandy niche in the hank, from where he would have to watch only in one direction. He hastened back to him with clothing and weapons, canteen and food, cursed him affectionately, then made a running jump into his saddle.

The tracks were plain, and told of speed and a direct flight; but to Red's eyes they also told of a weary horse. He leaned forward slightly and spoke to his mount, and thereupon the wind whistled past his ears. After an hour's riding he sighted the fugitive climbing a rise. The other looked back and strove to increase the speed of his horse, which was not wise after the long,

hard journey it had made from the Cactus-Johnsville trail.

Mesquite's backward glance showed him that he was being hotly pursued by one man. Then a bullet screamed past his ear, and another tore the sombrero from his head. Again he glanced back and saw the rifleman racing on again. He was all of a thousand yards distant, but he had shot as if it were a quarter of that range. Mesquite told himself it was lucky shooting. No man could come so close twice in succession, against a running target, at a thousand yards, except by luck; and then he cursed as a red-hot welt sprang across the top of his shoulder and he felt the hot blood trickling down his back and chest. He instantly reversed himself about that question of luck, and looked eagerly ahead of him at a thicket, which rose up among and around masses of tumbled rocks and boulders; and he exulted as he neared it. It were suicide to flee on a slowing horse from a man who shot as if he were the devil straight from hell; but once in that cover he would show the deputy what shooting was!

His mount wavered, and swift spurs covered its heaving sides with blood; and at the edge of the thicket Mesquite leaped from the saddle and landed behind a line of boulders as a lead splotch appeared on the rock and a wailing scream died out in the sky. He didn't give a second thought to the canteen and the food on his horse; he could get them after dark, when he would be on his way again, and once more free from pursuing enemies. Playing I-spy among the rocks was one of the best things he did.

He crept swiftly among the boulders to get away from this place and to hole up within sight of it, there to wait and let the other do the hunting, or until night fell and gave him a chance to steal the other's comparatively fresh horse and get away. He wriggled and crept farther and farther back, moving higher and higher up the gentle slope. At last he came to a nest of rocks which overlooked the whole edge of the cover, and once among them he would be content to watch and wait. He peered out between two boulders and caught sight

of the grazing horse, picketed well to the west. There was no sign of its owner, but sooner or later he would move about; and if he moved about, in due course he would show himself for a moment.

Mesquite was pushing himself back, feet first, among the rocks of the nest, when he caught sight of a shadow moving on a boulder between him and the edge of the cover, and he shifted his rifle a few inches, peering along the sights. The shadow grew and took on the shape of a man's head and sombrero, and the fugitive chuckled as he estimated the range, which was point blank, and he tightened his finger on the trigger. Then the shadow flowed back again, and he grunted in disappointment. The deputy was choosing the far side of the boulder for his advance. That meant he would come into sight from behind it on the right, and Mesquite intended to be ready for him.

He sneered as a sombrero arose from behind the rock, and he held his fire. It moved gently up and down, inviting him; but it invited in vain. Only a tenderfoot would bite on a bait like that. The position in which he lay was cramping for a shot to the right, and he pushed back farther into the opening among the rocks so his head and shoulders would clear the rock he lay behind and let him twist to its other side for a better shot. The fool still moved his sombrero up and down, as if any one with sense would let drive at a thing like that, and give away his position!

Shifting quickly, Mesquite's legs pushed against a piled up mass of debris stacked there against the rocks by some high wind; and with the pressure of his knees there came something which made him jump convulsively. The impact of a weighty body and two sharp, stinging punctures in his leg. Across his mind flashed the picture of the end of the Ferret, and then to his nostrils came a sudden, rank gust of the copperhead odor. The jump had carried him a little wide of the protecting rock, and he no sooner had touched the ground again than he rolled part way over and lay limp.

The sharp rifle crack from the right was followed by a cloud of gray-white smoke, drifting gently with the wind, and Red Connors slowly arose, pumping another

cartridge into the chamber of his weapon, although he knew he would have no immediate use for it. He was hatless, and the hot sun on his thin hair was not agreeable. He watched the victim of his shot, and then decided to have a quick look at him for the sake of formality, and climbed up the slope.

Red sniffed suspiciously before the rock pile, and searched for signs of snakes. He found none, and his widening glance showed him why a made-to-order snake den contained no reptiles. All around the rock pile the ground was covered with layers of cactus leaves without a break, except where the fugitive had cleared a way through them with the butt of his rifle. Red stooped and examined some of the stems, but they had dried out, and he could not be sure of what he suspected. If a chaparral cock had placed them there it must have been a long time ago.

He went around the rock and glanced at the figure huddled beside it, but his gaze immediately settled on a small, partly dried organ cactus which had fallen across one of the legs. He reached over and picked it up, eying it curiously. It resisted his first, careless effort, not because of its deceptive weight alone, but also because two of its longest, thickest spines had gone through the fugitive's trousers and skin, and deep into the flesh beneath them. Red tossed it aside, greatly puzzled, and went down the slope to get his sombrero off the plant on which it bobbed up and down in the wind, a tempting bait for a rifleman, but more useful to show falsely a man's position. He mounted and rode back toward the creek, his suspicions gradually becoming accepted.

"Huh! Imagination's a great thing. Shore as shootin' he reckoned he was struck by a snake!"

Back at the rock pile Mesquite opened his eyes, weak, dazed and utterly confused. He lay motionless for a few moments, then rolled over: again he shrank from the touch of fangs, and by a great effort raised his head and looked down his leg. What he saw meant nothing to him for a moment, and then the meaning slowly dawned on him. A look of relief passed across his face, and he closed his eyes to rest a while be-

fore making any attempt to get to his horse. Anyhow, it would be safer after dark.

The crescent moon smiled down upon the rugged plain, across which a tired horse plodded, its rider roped to the saddle and fighting to keep his consciousness; and shortly after dawn Johnny Nelson stared along the trail then, mounting hurriedly, raced to the inert body hanging from the saddle on a stumbling horse.

Three hours later Doc Reed closed the

bedroom door behind him and lit a stogy. He smiled at his one-time enemy, and at his enemy's wife.

"He'll come along affyin'," he said. "Mostly loss of blood an' exhaustion. Th' wound only stunned him: ain't no signs of fracture. You'll be surprised how soon he'll be bustin' cayuses. Solid muscle an' whalebone; stubborn as an ornery cow, an' *yung!* That's th' thing, Johnny: youth! Lord, how it eats punishment!"

Next week: "THE BOBCAT PAUSES."

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## THE BOATMAN OF KINSALE

HIS kiss is sweet, his word is kind,  
His love is rich to me;  
I could not in a palace find  
A truer heart than he.  
The eagle shelters not his nest  
From hurricanes and hail  
More bravely than he guards my breast—  
The Boatman of Kinsale.

The wind that round the Fastnet sweeps  
Is not a whit more pure,  
The goat that down the Cnoc Sheehy leaps  
Has not a foot more sure.  
No firmer hand nor freer eye  
E'er faced an autumn gale,  
De Courcy's heart is not so high—  
The Boatman of Kinsale.

The brawling squires may heed him not,  
The dainty stranger sneer,  
But who will dare to hurt our cot  
When Miles O'Hea is here?  
The scarlet soldiers pass along:  
They'd like, but fear to rail:  
His blood is hot, his blow is strong—  
The Boatman of Kinsale.

His booker's in the Scilly van,  
When seines are in the foam,  
But money never made the man,  
Nor wealth a happy home.  
So, bless'd with love and liberty,  
While he can trim a sail,  
He'll trust in God, and cling to me—  
The Boatman of Kinsale.

Thomas Osborne Davis.



# Out of the Moon

By HOMER EON FLINT

Author of "The Man in the Moon," "The Missing Mondays," etc.

## CHAPTER I.

### ALONE ON THE MOON.

IT is less than twenty hours since the last sky car left for the earth. The car is still visible to me through the telescope; the men will not be home for three days. As for myself, I do not expect ever to set foot upon the earth again.

Twenty hours, and already I am feeling lonely. Perhaps it is because I have nothing which must be done.

I finished setting up my little house ten hours ago, and another three hours sufficed to arrange my equipment just as I shall need it for the rest of my days. From now on all that I really have to do is to sit still and enjoy my freedom.

But there is no denying that, so far, I haven't obtained much satisfaction from the sensation. That is why I decided to sit

down at this typewriter, to set forth the situation in which I now find myself. Not that I expect it will ever be read by any one else; such a thing is virtually impossible. But the effort will serve to make me forget my temporary loneliness. Moreover, if I make this a habit, the record will amount to a diary, to which I can refer if ever I come to doubt my sanity. To be all alone is a very serious matter.

First, to state the reasons why I, Philip Foster, of the firm of Bates & Foster, constructing engineers, should have exiled myself here on the moon. Needless to say, I would never put these reasons into black and white if I dreamed that any one would find them. But the facts may come in very handy later on, should I ever need something with which to check up a failing memory.

It was because of a woman—Catherine

Brett, the widow of old Millionaire Brett. Being under thirty, she had the advantage of youth; and in many ways she was an exceptionally attractive and accomplished woman.

But I am, and presumably always shall be, an extremely bashful man. Although a member of a family to which social deportment is second nature, I always suffered acutely in the presence of any woman between fifteen and fifty. The only way that I could feel even slightly at ease was to agree, like a dunce, with everything that was said; and those few words explain the whole shameful affair.

Catherine made up her mind to marry me. I think it was social position that she was set upon.

Brett had left her a great deal of money, but not enough to buy her way into the circles which I, merely because my great-grandparents happened to have been "the Philadelphia Fosters," enjoyed through no virtue of my own. And, having determined to marry me, Catherine lost no time in setting the snare.

Now, let me make it clear that I find no fault with the lady. I don't wish to read this over, when I am an old man, and be made bitter because of her memory. Catherine was a firm believer in the theory of propinquity; she felt positive that, once we were married, love would develop between us quite as a matter of course. And she counted upon that love to take care of any differences of opinion and custom which might arise.

For certainly there were some very vivid differences. She was a beautiful woman, slender, graceful and tantalizingly languid in her manner; her face had a wistful quality which made her sought for and fought for by other men, not so diffident as I.

But I am a chunkily built fellow, about as graceful as a donkey engine, and as practical. The only redeeming thing about my face is an optimistic arrangement of some rather large features. In short, I am about the last man on earth whom any woman in her right mind would seek, for his own sake.

But Catherine misunderstood my idi-

otically agreeable attitude, and thought I had become smitten. Smitten! I, who would rather jump into boiling oil than to seek any woman whom it was possible to dodge! No man of my stamp could ever fall in love with anything so terrorizing, so capable of causing so much utter misery, as a woman; least of all, so thoroughly feminine a woman as Catherine Brett.

So, without realizing that my weakness was really an incurable curse, Catherine went blithely ahead with her plans. As for what they were, and just how they operated, I cannot say at all. I can merely set down the bare fact that inside of a few weeks I found myself more often in her company than with all other women put together. And invariably I could not escape.

It will always remain a mystery to me, I suppose. Catherine was a remarkable woman; that much is undeniable. Of course, to another woman it might seem simple enough, the way the game was played; but I am merely a practical scientist, and I must confess that, to this day, I retain a vast amount of respect for the woman who could and did trap me in the toils of Cupid.

Nevertheless, I wish to be entirely fair. The fact is that I am, by nature, extremely unwilling to hurt anybody's feelings. I am altogether too infernally sensitive about such things.

Had I deliberately offended Catherine in the first place, instead of appearing to agree with her, this awful mess wouldn't have come to pass. But I couldn't.

So she must have concluded that I was unwilling to propose because I didn't have as much money as she. Accordingly she induced old David Sulzman to engage my services.

Now, Sulzman was not far from being a billionaire, and an unusually proud and thoughtful man. He was anxious to have his name perpetuated in a way which would stand against all time, and forever remind the people of the earth that it was once the home of a really great tanner. And he decided that I, largely on Catherine's recommendation, should undertake to erect this monument.

I made good. I conceived the idea and carried it through, all without a hitch of any kind. In all probability this monument was the most stupendous engineering feat ever pulled off; I can always get a lot of satisfaction from that fact, no matter how lonely I may become, even though I live to be a hundred.

This is what I accomplished: First, I formed the Foster Construction Company, and, by spending Sulzman's money like water, I made preparations on a prodigious scale. I began by erecting a powerful apparatus for projecting radioactive substances into space—"the ray-projector," we called it; and it was set up in South America, not far from Quito.

Then, using a new sort of radioactivity which I synthesized several years ago—mining the material and refining it on the spot—I developed an antigravitational force of such terrific, unheard-of strength that I was able to dislodge the moon!

That is to say, I directed enough of "Foster's rays" against one side of the moon to produce a decided reduction in her velocity. Where formerly she had a speed, in her yearly journey round the sun, somewhat greater than that of the earth—enough to allow her to circle the planet every month—her velocity was now so much reduced that her month was increased to three hundred and sixty-five days.

Consequently, since she no longer sailed around the earth every twenty-nine days, she now remained always on that side of the planet farthest from the sun; and, obviously, the earth now has, and always will have, full moon each and every night.

But that is not all I did. This reduction in the speed of the moon broke up the former gravitational balance between her and the earth, so that the distance between them is now only one-tenth of what it used to be. In other words—since areas are in proportion to the squares of diameters—the moonlight on the earth is now a hundred times as great as formerly; and the net result is that the planet does not now need artificial light, and never will, for all time.

David Sulzman's money made all this possible. He is immortalized by the fact that the world knows his money did it.

And he came to me, as I have said, because Catherine Brett induced him so to do.

Well, after the work was about half completed, I came back home to find Catherine firmly convinced that we were engaged. At any rate, she flung herself into my arms in front of a house full of other women; and—what was I to do? In a week or so I found myself, totally without knowing how it had come about, breathlessly begging for her to set the day.

And so the world was informed that Catherine Brett was soon to become the bride of Philip Foster, the man who moved the moon. Think of it! Social position and unbounded advertising, all at one fell stroke. The woman's triumph was complete.

But I faced a future as black and fearsome as the night I had just succeeded in vanquishing. Life looked like a wilderness of toadstools.

Why, the mere proposition of getting married to any woman was downright torture to me; I could never stand the ordeal itself. And as for marrying Catherine—

I ran away! I took advantage of a very peculiar situation. The moon was then being maintained in her new location by means of the projector down in Ecuador; but it was necessary to make alterations in the satellite itself in order that this location might become self-supporting, as it were. Otherwise the moon would have fallen to the earth.

An expedition was required. Briefly, we fitted up a number of powerful sky cars, simple affairs, insulated against the etheric conditions, and forced them into space upon streams of the rays. Each was equipped with a small projector, powerful enough to check its fall to the moon; also a supply of material.

And when their crews reached the satellite, they proceeded to the farthestmost side—the side which has always been turned away from the earth—and there they swiftly blasted away almost exactly half the sphere; enough to restore a gravitational balance between planet and satellite.

I went along to boss things. When the job was done, the moon was no longer a sphere, but a hemisphere, with the curved side still toward the earth. The other side



is now an approximately flat surface, a level plain some twenty-one hundred miles in diameter. For the force of those rays was enough to blow all those rocks into space, with such velocity that—since the moon's gravity is so slight—none of it ever returned, or ever will.

Now, on the last day of our operations, I secretly unpacked a duplicate of the insulated, aluminium-armored suit that I had been wearing. Down to the oxygen-fed helmet, it was precisely the same. This duplicate I "planted" in a lifelike pose, in a spot which I knew to be next in line for the projector.

And I arranged matters so that this suit was observed just a moment before the rays were turned upon the spot. It was too late to give warning; and the duplicate suit was blown into space along with part of the moon; while, so far as most of my men knew, Philip Foster perished at the same instant.

But five of my men know that, down in the rocks upon which one of the sky cars had rested, lay a large natural cavern, stocked with supplies of all kinds. It was in this cavern that I was secreted when my other suit was destroyed; and it was here that, out of sight of all beholders, I continued to hide until finally all the crews left the moon.

And it is over this cabin that I have erected my little aluminium and glass observatory. I intend to keep most of my materials down there; it will save space up here. And, for the sake of keeping tab from time to time, suppose I make a list right here of the equipment with which I am provided:

1. One hemispherical glass house, twenty feet in diameter and ten feet high, with walls of double thickness. It is proof against both extreme cold and extreme heat, also against electric electricity. It is built with a vestibule that is provided with two doors, an inner one and an outer one. In order to pass in or out, all I have to do is to wear my suit and take care to close the one door before opening the other.

2. A fully equipped, though small scale laboratory. It contains everything from test tubes and lathe to chemicals and tele-

scopes. Of the latter, one is an eight inch refractor of unusual excellence. I am equipped to dabble in chemistry, physics, radioactivity, and astronomy. What more could an engineer ask?

3. Some thirty steel cylinders, triple insulated, each containing liquid oxygen. Rather, it was liquid *en route*, but now some of it is solid. By means of simple chemical apparatus, I am able to purify my little hoard of air of such carbon dioxide as my breathing creates, and replace it with fresh oxygen. I also have two cylinders of ordinary liquid air.

4. A wireless telegraph outfit, at present fitted only for receiving. Later I expect to work out a transmitting system such as will suit the rather peculiar conditions here. With what I have, however, I can learn the world's more important news, as transmitted daily by my partner, Bates. He will begin as soon as the sky cars have returned; no sooner, because all of them are fitted with outfits similar to mine; and only five of the men share my secret.

5. Two canaries—Fannie and Dickie. I would like to have had other creatures, but was obliged to consider the problem of supplies, especially oxygen. Neither bird has felt like singing, as yet.

6. Apparatus for collecting free electricity from the surrounding ether. More about this later, probably.

7. Far more food than I shall ever need. It is all hermetically sealed and protected from frost, and for the most part is pre-cooked, and condensed to the smallest possible space. I have everything from raisins to onions, from whale steak to pigs' feet. Moreover, I am planning a dietary system which will give me a complete change of fare, each meal for forty-five days at a stretch. So I do not expect ever to tire of my food.

8. A library as complete as money could make it. I have all that a man of my training could desire. Of encyclopedias, alone, there are no less than six; but while most of the volumes are technical, there are also several philosophical works, together with a little fiction—of an adventurous rather than a romantic description.

9. The armored, insulated suit already

referred to. This makes it possible for me to do any amount of exploring, and it is so well made that it will far outlast its wearer.

10. A miscellaneous collection of articles for light housekeeping, from teaspoons to a folding cot. I have a neat little electrical range, upon which I can heat such eatables as I may prefer hot. I also have a certain amount of plumbing, all very sanitary and convenient.

11. A large amount of liquified hydrogen. By combining this with oxygen, in the manner usually employed to secure water synthetically in laboratories, I shall be able to deal generously with the thirst problem. I intend to install some frost-proof piping, and manufacture the water down in the cavern, so as to save space up here.

12. An unclassified assortment of articles such as hardly deserve special mention here, although I may have occasion to mention them all in time. One is the finest medicine chest I could find, together with instructions. I expect to have no need whatever for anything, except for certain astringent drugs on occasions when I must be in my suit for long periods.

13. Last, but perhaps the most important of all, I possess two fine talking machines. One is of the cylinder type, for recording only. I intend to "can" a few sentences of my own nearly every day, for reference in the future. The other machine uses disk records, of which I own some four thousand, all different. They include music, recitations, and many other numbers, enough to keep me interested for the balance of my life. My scheme is to use one hundred until I begin to tire of them, then start another hundred. By the time the fortieth hundred has been finished, the first should seem quite new. Their main value will be to keep me from talking to myself, a habit which would surely lead to the loss of my reason. I shall take the utmost care with every disk.

One thing only that I need to regret: this equipment cost a vast amount of money—far more than ought to be spent on any one individual. But Sulzman unquestioningly paid every bill; moreover, I have no doubt that the people of the earth, as they

enjoy their permanent full moon to-night, would never object to the expense if they knew all the facts.

I think I will stop now and prepare a little supper; then I shall play a dozen or so of my records, and turn in for my customary eight hours of sleep.

I do not expect to dream any but pleasant dreams. I am perfectly satisfied with life. I could not ask to have things different. I am serene in the knowledge that I have done something decidedly worth while for humanity.

I have no compunctions about running away from Catherine, for I have given her what she sought—prominence. She occupies the enviable position of fiancée to a martyr. What does it matter if the martyr remains alive, so long as people think him dead?

To-morrow I begin exploring.

## CHAPTER II.

### NEVER DONE BEFORE.

NOVEMBER 23.—I was about to begin this entry with, "Arose this morning after a good night's rest"; but I remembered in time that such would be far from accurate. Not on this satellite; the conditions here are too radically different from what they are on the earth. In fact, if I merely state that there was really no such thing as night here, I should be giving only a fragment of the whole peculiar situation.

Perhaps I ought to describe the condition of affairs, just in case there should ever come a time when I might need reassuring. To begin with, I am located on the western "edge" of the moon, at a point not far from what would be called the equator, by any one studying a lunar map. On such a map, the nearest conspicuous object is the crater "Langrenus," about a hundred and fifty miles southeast of me. Northeast twice that distance is the edge of the great sea-bottom, known as "Mare Crisium." So much for topography, as seen from the earth.

Now, because of my position on the edge of this little world, my observatory house

never receives the vertical rays of the sun. Old Sol is always just at the horizon; sometimes, due to a certain libration in the path of the moon, he is just above the surface, and at other times only partially in sight. Never will he totally disappear, and never will he rise even one hour high.

I chase this spot with that item in mind, knowing that if I took up my residence directly opposite the earth, right under the sun, I should find the brilliance intolerable; while if I picked a spot which might ever be in total darkness, I should have some pretty trying times, dependent entirely upon artificial light. As it is, I live in continual twilight, or rather dawn.

That is the situation. The new position of the moon not only keeps the same face always earthward, the same as earth has always seen, but it now keeps this face always sunward, as well. There will never be an eclipse, because the original operations of the ray-projector in Ecuador were so calculated as to throw the moon forever slightly out of line with the earth's shadow. The sunlight here is *constant*.

East, north and south of me stretches the great hemisphere of crater-strewn country, such as the telescopes of the earth know so well—the territory which it shall be my business to explore very thoroughly. West of me, not two hundred yards away, the surface of the moon comes to an abrupt end. A steep precipice is all that remains of the other side of the satellite.

It is just as though some giant of the universe had sliced off half the satellite and cast it away. The precipice is merely one vast circular plain, twenty-one hundred and odd miles in diameter.

Hold on! I wrote the same thing yesterday, by Jove! I shall have to watch myself; it is a bad sign when a man gets to repeating himself. It shall not occur again.

The ground upon which my house is erected is not ground at all, but the solidest kind of rock. I would call it silicate, for want of a more exact term; the stuff is bluish black, exceedingly hard and smooth, and not to be accounted for by the action of either fire or water, or a combination of the two. It isn't lava, and it isn't basalt; it is more like hard rubber, only heavier.

My house is located upon a sea of such rocks. Some of them are great fragments—not boulders, for boulders would show some indications of weathering—but immense jagged chunks, slabs and splinters, alike only in that their edges are as sharp and clean cut as if fresh from some convict's rock pile.

Of course, there is no air here on the moon, except for just what I have here in my house. Neither is there any other water. I find that I must continually remind myself of these two facts, in order to understand what I see.

My landscape is a black and white one. There is no such thing as color; either an object is brilliantly lighted by the sun, or else it is totally invisible. Blackness or dazzling light; there is nothing in between. All this, of course, is due to the lack of air, which prevents refractions and diffusion of light.

The only thing at all like it that I ever saw on the earth was some of the early moving pictures; they were painfully devoid of any softening shadows, just like the "scenery" around here. I might also mention that, because of the position of the sun, near the horizon, all the shadows are long ones; it is as though the sun were always rising or always setting—somewhere in the highest part of the Rockies.

When I look about the horizon, however, I see something more than black rocks, white lights, and long black shadows. For one thing, I see the sun; that is, if I put on some heavily smoked glasses. Otherwise his terrific brilliance, unhooded by any intervening atmosphere as on the earth, would blind me in two seconds.

In size he is just about the same; but, since there is no air, he looks neither bigger nor yellower because of his position on the horizon. On the earth, he would.

I also see Mother Earth. She would be a wonderful object if only I could see her with the sunlight on her face; but of course this will always be impossible. The moon lies "outside" the earth, with respect to the sun, and I shall have to be content with her moonlit surface.

However, she is something to be mighty grateful for, just as she stands. I can watch

her daily revolution as no man ever watched it before. Every twenty-four\* hours, with the utmost regularity, North America will swing into view; and as long as I live to use my telescope I can always focus upon California at midnight and look down on San Francisco, to fancy that I see my friends getting into their airplanes after finishing their after-theater suppers.

In fact, the earth is the only bit of color in my landscape. As viewed from here, she is a dull, copper color, except where the sunlight touches; there, she is a dazzling golden tint. Near the poles she is white with snow and ice; and it is always easy, even with the naked eye, to distinguish the green blue of the oceans as they swing majestically into opposition.

In size, of course, the planet is immense—nearly twenty degrees, an eighteenth of the whole sky circle, from pole to pole. But obviously I never see more than half of her disk at any one time, because of my position at the edge of the moon. If I want to see the whole disk at one view, I shall have to travel to a more central spot.

No air; no water; black rocks that are blistering hot where the sun shines upon them, and freezing cold a few inches away, in the shadow; a blinding sun. A gigantic mother earth, in a ruddy semidarkness; a continual, unending day—no such thing as night.

No man Friday to share my exile; nothing but my wireless. Shall I lose all sense of time?

Not if I take a little care. My chronometers are adjusted to keep the same time they always kept back on the earth; every twenty-four hours, as ticked off by their balance wheels, I shall designate as one full day.

(By the way, I have an ordinary pendulum clock in operation, which offers a curious comparison. The reduced gravity of the moon results in a "second" about six times as long as that of the earth or my chronometers. According to that clock I have

been on the moon only seven hours and fifteen minutes, instead of about forty-four hours.) Of course, a year is a year here, the same as back home. I shall not become confused. I dare not.

Yes, I might as well have begun this with "Arose this morning." I'm going to stick to the old day, the old way. All I need to do to keep up the semblance of conditions on the earth is to draw the shades on the sunlit side of the house, as I did last—well, let it go at that—last night.

So, after a very hearty breakfast, at about the hour I always used to eat breakfast, I got out my suit and gave it an extra careful inspection. Next, I removed the weighted shoes which I, and all my men, had worn for the purpose of offsetting the difference in gravitation between the planet and the satellite; we wore them so as to make our movements more natural. But now I am a resident—in fact, the only resident, so far as it is humanly possible to know—the only resident of the moon, and I mean to acclimatize myself at once.

For the first time, then, since I was left alone on the satellite, I ventured outside my double doored vestibule. I moved with the utmost care, placing my feet slowly and carefully. I felt amazingly light and free, and for a while suspected that I was allowing too much oxygen to feed into my helmet. But after inspecting the gauges, I concluded that the feeling was due entirely to my reduced weight.

I weighed only thirty pounds, instead of a hundred and eighty. Such was the net effect of the moon's reduced gravitation. At the same time, nothing whatever had occurred to reduce my muscular strength in the least. My heavy armor and helmet added only six moon pounds to my weight. I was a veritable giant.

I felt no ill effects whatever. Of course, before leaving the vestibule, I had not only made sure that there were no leaks of any kind in my suit, but had pumped in a little more air, just in case a leak should develop.

\* "Twenty-four hours." Of course, it is true that the "recoil" of the ray-projector, in Equador, while reducing the speed of the moon, naturally produced a complementary increase in the speed of the earth's daily revolution; so that the day is actually only twenty-two hours long, old time. But to avoid confusion, the Standard Second was revised, thus keeping the old and well understood system. It will be noted that Mr. Foster was aware of all this.

The purpose of this, obviously, was to maintain the same pressure upon the outside of my body as it has always been accustomed to. Otherwise, the effect would have been much the same as bringing the diver too rapidly to the surface; blood vessels would burst, and death ensue.

The people of the earth seldom stop to think that their bodies are at all times subject to a pressure of fourteen pounds to each square inch; and if this pressure were suddenly removed, the effect would be actually explosive. The pressure works both ways, from the inside out, as well as from the outside in.

When I say that I felt no ill effects, I mean that I experienced no vertigo, dizziness or weakness. On the other hand, I was distinctly elated, vigorous and clear headed. I had just enough sense left to go slowly, and take things coolly.

I stepped out of the vestibule and closed the outer door behind me. Had it not been for the peculiar, insulated construction of my suit, I should have died in my tracks, right then and there. For I was exposed to three extremely powerful influences, either of them enough to annihilate me instantly had I not been protected against them; three forces such as no one on the earth could appreciate to the full. Let me name them:

*Cold.* I was facing the sun; but my back was in the shadow, and the temperature of things in the shade, on the moon, is about three hundred below zero! It is very close to what scientists call "the absolute zero"; unthinkable cold, capable of congealing the blood of a human in less time than I could record the event on this typewriter.

*Heat.* The side of me that faced the sun, on the other hand, was receiving untempered sunbeams. No air intervened to soften the impact of the sun's energy; my thermometer had already told me that the temperature of any material capable of absorbing heat, such as mercury or the human body, would rise to past two hundred and fifty degrees! Without my suit, I should have been cooked to a crisp on one side, and frozen solid on the other. All because there is no air!

*Electricity.* Here I touch upon a subject that is not generally understood; but it is rapidly becoming known among scientists that the hundred miles or so of atmosphere which surrounds the earth is really a great insulating blanket. Were it not for this air, no one could live upon the planet without continual protection.

This, for the simple reason that lightning, so well known but so poorly understood, is nothing more or less than universal energy—the luminiferous ether in action—which occasionally manages to break down the insulation and touch the earth. As for myself, on the moon, I was literally bathed in current; without my suit, I should have been instantly electrocuted.

Looking through the double glazed, vacuum insulated windows of my non-conducting helmet, I was virtually unconscious of all this. I could move about in perfect safety and with entire freedom, so long as I took reasonable care, and kept a close watch upon my pressure gauge, my oxygen, and my carbonic acid absorber. I gave a final glance into my domelike house, to make sure that I had left everything in order—especially the canaries—and then ventured cautiously perhaps ten yards away.

My new home looked pitifully small. It came to me with sudden, tremendous force that, for the last two days, only those thick glass walls had stood between me and instant death. I was immensely glad that nothing, so far as I could see, would ever happen to that structure. If I thought an accident at all possible, I should wear my suit continually, indoors as well as outside.

A little further away from the house, and I came to an open spot, where the surface was comparatively level. That is to say, the rock fragments were small and evenly spread out for a space perhaps fifty feet either way. It looked like a good place to begin experiments.

Fixing my eye upon a flat stone about thirteen or fourteen feet away—too far for me to jump on the earth—I drew a deep breath, discarded every one of my former cautious methods, and, just as if I were back in California, I took a single bold

step forward. That one step took me to the stone!

So much for having a weight of only thirty-six pounds, armor and all. Shortly I was striding about rather freely, covering always about thirteen feet at a step, as compared with thirty-two inches on the earth. Not only were my movements unhampered by gravity, but I did not have to overcome any air resistance, much less a wind.

It was like moving in a dream, except that I could distinctly feel the usual jar and shock of walking, on my heels. However, this jar was insignificant compared with what I had been used to. Instead of ninety pounds falling on each foot now—only eighteen.

Soon I felt safe in ordinary walking. I went to one side of the space I was using, and faced the other. Then I gathered my strength as for a standing broad jump, determined upon a spot about ten yards away—and leaped.

### CHAPTER III.

#### EXPLORING THE MOON.

**A**WAY I went sailing through space. It reminded me of one of those trick motion pictures—"slowed up"—in which people go through various antics at an unnaturally slow pace. I thought I should never get back to the surface. I must have gone all of twenty feet high. But in two or three seconds I saw my target deliberately approaching me, and knew, long before I landed, that I had overshot my mark.

Down I came six feet beyond the point I had aimed for, landing clumsily and stumbling, so that I groveled on my hands and knees. But I was merely a little shaken. The armor saved me.

Up I got and tried again. Presently I became so confident that I began to make use of the time that I was sailing. As soon as I leaped, I looked about for a few seconds, and from the height thus attained was able to inspect a large stretch of country.

Southeast of me, where I knew the crater Langrenus to be located, I could make out

a number of mountains, all of them in the crater form; no peak, but simply an elevated cup; but none had a tenth the size that I knew Langrenus to possess. However, it was extremely hard to be sure of this; the peculiar black and white of the landscape was very deceptive.

If there had been a little air to temper the shadows in the background, so as to give some effect of perspective, sizes and distances would have been more easily guessed at. But far or near it was simply black and white.

Northeast of me were more of these craterlets, and beyond them, I knew, was the great sea bottom, Mare Crisium. I was already quite familiar with craters from my experiences on the other side of the moon during the blasting; but this ancient ocean bed appealed to me strongly. My curiosity will not let me rest until I have seen Crisium.

But the distance is about three hundred miles. Assuming that I can travel six times as fast as on the earth, it will take me a day and a half to reach the spot, the same length of time to return, and at least two days for exploration. This means a lot of supplies; more than I can possibly carry. Must I give up the idea?

Not at all. This is a difficulty which I foresaw long ago; and while I never took time to work it out I nevertheless brought along enough raw materials of various kinds to enable me to solve the problem. I shall enjoy the work.

Required: To construct something hitherto unknown, a machine for traveling on the surface of the moon. Given: Some pieces of metal and wood, some books, and one second rate brain!

*November 24.* I failed to finish my account of yesterday's experiences, for the very good and sufficient reason that I became so tired and sleepy that I had to go to bed. No wonder; I have seldom exercised as much as I did during my first attempts to do as the Romans do. (Unfortunately there are no Romans here; besides, the correct name for an inhabitant of the moon, I believe, is "Selenite.") And as for my appetite—I'm afraid the larder will not permit of a great deal of such exercise.

This morning I arose without so much as giving a second glance at the sun, which had been in exactly the same place all "night" long. In fact, I completely forgot that there had been no such thing as night, that there was no such thing as morning. I am getting to be quite a man of the moon.

Outside of that, I accomplished little. All I did was to go outside and limber up a little, keeping always within sight of the house. On my way back I took a flying leap and sailed entirely over it, thus setting a new record. Leaped over a house! Who on earth could do that?

Then, after luncheon, I got out a number of my books and brushed up on the subjects which I need to know, if I am to succeed in building my moon car. I reached no conclusions. Apparently the problem is decidedly more difficult than I had anticipated.

After dinner, about three hours ago, I found myself becoming very blue and gloomy. Awakening to the fact, I wound up my talking machine; and it required only ten records, judiciously selected so as to amuse and cheer me, to take out all the kinks in my disposition. I am in an enviable frame of mind. I wouldn't trade places with any man in existence, even though he never knew what it is to be hashful.

*November 25.* Thanksgiving Day. The boys in the sky cars will spend a gloomy holiday—all except the five who know—for they cannot help but look forward to breaking the news. Poor devils; I wish I had thought of that. Too late now, though.

Fortunately, no one on the earth will be so affected. Those who are not in the secret, yet have any reason to concern themselves with my return, probably are making some sort of preparations. I understood that there was to be a big reception, or something of that sort. Another affair which I shall escape, and for which I am duly thankful.

I sat down at my drawing table and tried for an hour to puzzle out a design for my moon car. No ideas would come; I saw that I wasn't in a mood for inventing. So I decided to make a short excursion; and put-

ting ten hours' supply of oxygen into the tank on the back of my suit, also placing certain other materials inside the helmet, I began my first real exploration.

Right now, as I write, my glance rests upon the astounding fruits of that trip. The incredible thing lies there a foot away; last night, nothing of the sort was inside this house. I wonder if I would have been so eager to start out this morning had I known what I was going to bring back?

Well, my objective was a small crater about fifty miles directly east of me. I had often seen it while leaping. I chose that direction because I could not possibly become confused; all I had to remember was that, although I started out with my face toward the sun, I should return with my shadow straight before me.

At first I contented myself with a fairly rapid stride. I covered ground at an immense rate; eighteen miles an hour, walking, isn't that all. But I soon became tired of having to pick a footing so often among those annoyingly sharp rock fragments; besides, the sensation of annihilating distance so rapidly soon amounted to a kind of intoxication. Shortly I found myself running and leaping, like some clumsy mountain sheep, from one crag to the next.

It was amazing, the ease with which I adapted myself to the new order of things. I picked out the most precarious landing places and hit them almost without fail; and when I did miss, which was seldom, nothing much came of it. I merely tumbled eight or ten feet, and hardly noticed it at all.

As I say, I didn't have to worry about directions. There was no such thing as "time of day"; whenever I glanced at the sun I did not have to make allowances. I didn't have to worry about getting back before nightfall; there wasn't going to be any nightfall. I merely had to watch my step.

Once I came near to ending everything. It was after perhaps an hour of the swiftest sort of leg work. I had covered over twenty miles. The area of rock fragments was now behind me; I had reached a very different sort of territory, with a surface of gray, glassy material, flecked with sands.

It was quite capable of deceiving most people into calling it lava, because of its beat twisted configurations; and since the stuff is really the remains of what was once molten rock, lava is perhaps as good a term as any; for I have never seen a schist on earth with such a color.

I had no idea that anything was in store for me. Of course, the surface was extremely rough, but no longer full of sharp edges and jagged points. Instead, the schist was mounded, rolled and twisted in every conceivable way. One moment a great terrace, thirty feet high, would compel me to make a strenuous leap, and next I would be facing a maze of contorted dikes, over which I would hurtle without a glance.

I was making wonderful progress. I forgot to stop and rest. And it was just when I had become thoroughly tired and winded that I came to the crevice.

It was over a hundred yards wide. I did not see it until I was right on its brink. In fact, I had already landed, only a few steps from the edge, my leg all tense for springing on, before I realized that the next leap would take me into the depths of the moon.

How I did it I do not know; but somehow I contrived to make my foot slip, even in the act of bounding. The slip saved my life. Instead of flying up into space again, I fell forward upon my face, and slid helplessly toward the chasm. When I finally stopped, my head and shoulders were actually over the edge.

I looked down. The sun wasn't shining directly into the cleft, and I couldn't see very plainly; however, there was no dust or air to interfere with what I did see. And, although I cannot say just how deep that awful crack may be, at least I can submit that the bottom lies *more* than five miles down.

In order to find a place where the crack was narrow enough to leap, I had to detour about two miles. However, this took only a few minutes; I discovered a place where any amateur could have made the jump with ease. It wasn't over forty feet.

But the experience served to make me more cautious. I forced myself to rest every so often. During one of these rests I

thought to look at the time—my watch being bung on the inside of my helmet, safe from the elements—and saw that it was after eleven.

Time to eat something; so, twisting my head in another direction, I connected my mouth with the upper end of a rubber tube, leading to a flask of milk at the back of my suit. I also had some toast and dried meat placed within tooth range; and I finished it all off with a mouthful of black coffee. All this arrangement, of course, because I dared not open my helmet except indoors. I missed my napkin, and will arrange for one next time.

The craterlet was now just before me, not more than five miles away. Up I got, decidedly refreshed, and before long I was making my way at a lively rate up the flanks of the "volcano." My path took me, first, into a steep "lava" swept ravine, then by easy stages on up to a ridge, and thence steadily upward.

The surface was mainly fantastic schist and gneiss formations, except at the very crest of the ridge where black rock—basalt itself—occasionally showed for a foot or two. However, I picked out specimens of nearly every known metamorphic rock, all fused, and usually glassy. Mainly I was concerned with the labor of climbing. Of course, I did not approach from the shadowed side, for that would have meant working in total darkness; I ascended the northern flank. I am making a special note of this because, for all I know, it may have an important bearing upon the discovery I made, and am about to relate.

After two or three tumbles, one of which bruised me even through the armor, I reached the top of the "crater." It stood perhaps four thousand feet high—a puny affair, as lunar mountains go. The point where I viewed the pit was really a mountain pass, the lip of the crater being composed of small, jagged peaks arranged roughly in the form of a circle.

On the outer side these crags sloped away evenly to the plain below; on the inner side they dropped away abruptly in an almost perpendicular precipice, many thousands of feet high, and ending in the floor of the "volcano," shrouded in total



blackness. The nearly horizontal rays of the sun allowed only such glimpses as I was able to get by means of rifts in the crags; but I was not disappointed in this, because I had known what to expect. I also knew that no man would ever explore that bottom unless he used artificial light.

I fell to thinking of the theory, favored by such scientists as do not consider these pits to be true volcanoes, that they were caused by the impact of great meteors upon the surface of the moon while it was still in a molten condition. The appearance is certainly very similar to the effect of pebbles thrown into stiff mud. And there is another theory which claims that, while the larger craters were actually volcanic, the smaller ones were produced by the falling of material previously ejected from the others.

But I know better, and the scientific men of the earth now know better. They know that all these craters were produced in the same way, and that they were formed *after* the satellite had hardened, not before. And that they were due, not to meteors nor to internal heat, but to lightning.

Electricity did it. When the moon lost her atmosphere, the insulation broke down, and every time the etheric current managed to break through in large quantities a crater was formed. Prodigious quantities of unleashed electricity, of which ordinary lightning is only a tiny sample—it was this that, striking the surface of the satellite, produced those terrific pits.

And, of course, the largest discharges came last, when the insulation was nearly gone, which explains why some of the larger pits overlap the smaller. The heat must have been like that of the sun; small wonder that the rocks are fused, like those from volcanoes.

It must have been a sight for the gods when that final stroke of superlightning created the giant pit which men call Tycho! And what another sight, a few millions of years hence, when the earth shall have lost her air and water, and her surface be reduced to "pockmarks"! That is, unless an enlightened and harmonious humanity does something to conserve that atmosphere beforehand.

It was a sobering thought. I stood there alone in that fire blasted wilderness, and marveled, as I had marveled time and time again during the last few weeks, at the immeasurable power of unchecked nature.

I was surrounded by the torn and slashed up fragments of what had once been sandstone—sandstone, a formation due to the action of water! And in two or three places I could even discern fragments of metamorphosed shale; and shale is merely mud, with all that the word suggests.

This had once been a world like that I have quit for good; at least, geologically speaking. What did I, a mere human and transplanted one, at that, amount to alongside such a cataclysm?

Well, I had fifty miles to travel before dinner time, and I didn't propose to postpone eating just because the sun would never go down. I turned to go.

Something unusual caught my eye. It was lying in a small cavity on the western slope of a huge rock fragment; the stone was fused, and the thing I saw was half buried in, half protruding from, a pool of brownish glass. I went over and examined it.

And if I had found a newspaper instead I could not have been more amazed. For there, in the wildest spot in creation, fifty miles from any point where men from the earth had already trod, was something that argued human occupancy. What was more, it was, as I have said, half buried in what had once been molten material; so I knew that it had existed *before* the crater was formed.

And it lies at my hand as I write. It is a piece, perhaps eight or nine inches long, altogether, of ordinary half inch, round, electric light carbon!

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE DISAPPEARANCE.

NOVEMBER 26.—I did not attempt to finish my diary last night. I was too much upset by what I had found. It took over forty records to make me forget enough to permit sleep. Even then I dreamed all sorts of outrageous things, some

terrifying, some merely ludicrous. All because of a piece of common carbon, presumably millions of years old!

What does it mean? Does it indicate that there has once been civilization on the moon? The idea is not at all untenable; if we assume that earth and moon were both formed from the same mass of cosmic material, then life could just as easily have come into being here as on the earth. And since the moon is smallest, it would have cooled off sooner, thus permitting life at an earlier day. Millions of years ago!

But what has become of the inhabitants? Have they lived and died, leaving no traces other than this electricity proof carbon, long before the earth became cool enough to support life? Or were they still alive when the great discharges of universal electricity began their terrible rain? If so, they could not have lived through it.

Surely they foresaw the loss of air. Why had they apparently done nothing to forestall this disaster? For example, a glass roof over the whole of their globe? But there were no signs of this. Was it likely that they had become as far advanced as us humans?

Something else occurred to me. Had these people become so highly developed along scientific lines—that piece of carbon is unanswerable—they produced some sort of sky cars and, before the lightning broke through, managed to migrate to the earth?

I did not go to sleep until after midnight. For the first time, I devoutly wished that I might enjoy real darkness once more. I have always valued my sleep very highly.

Well, this morning I resolved to forget my find for the day; further speculation would not help matters. Besides, I was keenly aware that my friends had reached the earth some time during the night, if nothing had occurred to delay them. I might hear from Bates at any moment.

So I sat down at the drawing table and tried to work on my car design. It was hopeless. Every few minutes I would get up and walk around my little circle, as nervous and excited as a boy waiting for a circus parade. I tried to read; I might as well have tried to emhroider.

In desperation I finally started the talk-

ing machine, purposely selecting something very involved and intricate in classical music—Bach, I think. In trying to understand it I presently got over my nervousness.

At ten twenty-four, to be exact, the first message arrived from the earth. I am glad that there was no one to see me as I excitedly fitted the headpiece to my ears. My eagerness was positively childish.

And then, what did Jack see fit to transmit—in code, of course—but a message like this:

Hello, man in the moon!

You ought to be here. People think more of you dead than alive. All sorts of puff stuff. You're a martyr to science—you hum-bug!

Catherine Brett is prostrated by the news. Vows she will never marry any one else.

More later. Don't dare send too much; amateurs might get the code. Hurry up with your transmitter.

JACK.

*November 27.* It occurred to me this morning that I did overlook one thing, after all, despite the thoroughness with which I made my preparations. I forgot to arrange with Jack to call me only at agreed upon hours!

It means that I shall have to remain here at all times; must never leave the house for more than a few minutes, lest I miss something. Either that, or I must contrive to build that transmitter and let Jack know. Or—and this has just occurred to me—I can make some sort of an automatic recorder, to take care of any message at any time!

Why didn't I think of that before? Easily made; I'm going straight to do it now.

I ought to mention, however, that it has been a pleasant day. No rain, no snow, no winds; not a cloud in the sky; temperature at sixty-eight every minute. How soon will I be praying for a change? I wonder.

*November 28.* A gloomy day, if ever a day of continual sunlight could be called gloomy.

In the first place I wasted a lot of mighty valuable material in trying to solve my automatic recorder problem along the wrong lines. I shall try again, of course, working

on another principle; but it makes me impatient with myself to have used my head so inefficiently.

Perhaps it was because of Fannie. I found her dead in her cage this morning. I am not sure, but I really think that I know what time she died. It was about three in the morning, and I awoke with a vague feeling that something was wrong. I dismissed the thought as due to a dream; I know better now.

I may as well admit that I could not eat breakfast until I had not only disposed of her body, but had also taken her cage outdoors. I hid it behind some rocks. I couldn't bear to leave it where I might see it.

As if this were not enough, Jack's message was equally lacking in cheer. I must hurry and get that transmitter done, and tell the old boy to take care with what he sends me. Here is what he judged fit for me, twenty-four thousand miles from the nearest fellow human, to read and digest:

You are missing something great. At instigation of San Francisco officials, the United States is going to give you an official funeral. Is to be a gorgeous ceremony, to take place three days hence. Notables already *en plane* from all parts of the globe.

Catherine Brett is said to have started the movement. Your relatives make no statement; apparently do not wish to make themselves conspicuous by objecting.

Nothing has taken the public fancy so much since the Revival. You really ought to have died long ago.

I wonder if the old fellow is deliberately rubbing it in. Someone told me just before I left with the crews that Jack was really jealous because I got so much applause out of the moon moving stunt. Can it be?

Pshaw; I ought to be ashamed of myself: distrusting my old partner! What the deuce has got into me? I never used to be like this.

Well, talking about it won't make it any better. It's up to me to start the good old talking machine once more. Wonder how many records it will take this time?

An idea! I'll teach Dickie to sing in unison with "Listen to the Mocking Bird." It may take months, but I've got more time than anything else, just now.

*November 29.* I hardly know how to begin. Something very peculiar has happened; something more than peculiar—it is positively uncanny. In fact, I am very chary about writing anything at all about it to-night.

It happened about one o'clock. I went outside for a little exercise at that hour, knowing it to be Jack's luncheon hour, and therefore feeling sure that I should miss no messages. I limbered up pretty thoroughly and even started a perspiration. And, as I say, it was about one when I decided to come back indoors.

As luck would have it, my practice on the crags had taken me over to the same side of the house as the spot where I had hidden Fannie's cage. Halfway back I recalled this fact, and would have made a detour to avoid seeing the thing if I had not forced myself to keep straight on. I almost wish, now, that I had gone around.

It should be mentioned here that the cage was made of carbo-aluminum wire and plates, a material decidedly antielectric. Also, when I placed the thing where I did yesterday, I noticed that, although the handful of birdseed on the floor vanished in a flash of blue flame as soon as exposed to the etheric current, yet the framework was as sound as ever. So the incident cannot be explained that way.

When I, leaping homeward, approached the place where I had left the cage, I purposely prepared for a long jump, so that I would see no more than a mere glimpse of it. Up I shot into space, and while I spent the usual seconds in mid flight I gave the surface below a single deliberate look.

The cage was not there!

My first thought was one of vast relief; I was glad that I had been spared the sight. Then, I instantly began to wonder; and next moment I turned in my tracks and began a thorough search for the cage.

Fifteen minutes later I returned to the house, empty handed. And I know that one thing or the other is true: either I am out of my senses, or else something—or some one—has taken that cage!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



# Crab Reef

By **THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS**

*Author of "Sea Change," "Where All Trails End," etc.*

**A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE**

THE governor had been robbed, and the consternation on Fort Royal Hill sent a ripple of excitement through the town, along the water front, and aboard the ships. Constables became alert, and the military marched here and there, arresting suspicious looking persons and smashing open cupboards and lockers with the butts of their muskets. The search grew in vigor. It ran like fire through the lower town and the anchored and moored shipping. Heads were broken and many arrests were made. Even the shops and houses of respectable tradesmen were searched. But the governor's jewel case and two bags of gold were not found.

Within forty-eight hours of the robbery on Fort Royal Hill, old Caleb Stave, the

ship-chandler of Crahhole Alley, set up a horrid outcry. He could not have made a more piteous and distracting disturbance if he had lost his granddaughter Sally. He, too, had been robbed. His strong box was gone.

It was not until night that the ship-chandler accused his servant Griffon of the theft of the strong box. He and Griffon and a black slave named Big Tom were in the shop at the time. Griffon was not surprised at the accusation, for the term of his indenture was almost up, and he knew that Stave would go to any length of injustice to keep him from his freedom. He was not surprised, but anger rose in his throat like a choking hot coal. He knew the uselessness of denial. There was no justice for

him and his kind. He was as much a slave as the black African.

"You verminous old liar!" he cried, and hurled a bag of yams at his master.

The main force of yams struck Stave and carried him to the floor, and one vegetable flew at a tangent and overturned and extinguished the lantern.

"Run out back," whispered Big Tom. "De constablers am in front."

Old Stave yelled murder, and as Griffon slipped from the sweltering and odoriferous shop to the foul yard in the rear, two constables and a soldier entered by the front door. The constables had cudgels in their hands and cutlasses on their hips, and one carried a lantern. The soldier had his musket.

"Thief! Thief!" cried the ship-chandler. "Griffon, the white man! The back door!"

The fellow with the lantern tripped over something and came to the floor with a crash which knocked all the wind out of him and doused the light. The soldier fell over the prostrate constable, the musket flew from his grasp and cracked old Stave's shins; and at that moment the back door closed. The second constable, believing himself in a trap—for the reputation of Crabhole Alley was not above suspicion—laid about him blindly with his cudgel and brought bolts of sailcloth toppling and sliding onto the confusion on the floor.

"The back door!" screamed Stave. "Who shut it? Pull it open, Tom! Where's that black?"

"The lantern!" cried the soldier, scrambling to his feet just in time to check a swing of the cudgel with his left ear. He collapsed with a grunt. Old Stave found the door, yanked it open, leaped forward, caught his foot in the shank of an anchor which some one had laid across the doorway, pitched head first into a strongly constructed hen coop, and forgot what the disturbance was about for a little while.

Peter Griffon ran for his freedom through starshine and shadow. He beaded inland, scaling stone walls, dashing and scrambling from one narrow yard to another. But there were lanes to be crossed; and in one of these he dashed into the midst of a corporal's guard. He was challenged, but

rushed on. The corporal made a blind prod at him, and sank an inch of iron in his left shoulder, but he broke away and burst open a little door in a wall. He crashed the door shut behind him and fled across the yard and over the farther wall. He was losing blood, but he continued to run at top speed. Presently he won clear of the lower town and ran through decent gardens and across lawns, in the dense black shade of bulky trees of mahogany, breadfruit and mango.

The corporal and his two subordinates followed on Griffon's course with a clatter of arms and an outcry of oaths and threats; and Big Tom trailed close upon the heels of the three soldiers, silent as a shadow, pausing now and again to touch his right shin tenderly with an inquiring finger. The thing which the constable with the lantern had fallen over back in Caleb Stave's shop had been the African's right leg; and it had not been an accident on Tom's part. He had given a patch of black hide cheerfully in a good cause.

The soldiers were soon winded. The cross-belts and high leather stocks of the military uniforms of that period were not conducive to prolonged bouts of physical exertion on a windless tropical night. One by one they crumpled and lay puffing; and Big Tom passed them, one by one, like a shadow.

Griffon cleared the last garden of the town, crossed a white road, and ducked into a great field of canes. Though suffering desperately from fatigue and loss of blood, he now forced his protesting legs and lungs to top speed, for he had glimpsed a pursuer among the shrubs of the last garden a few seconds ago. The rows of canes lay at right angles to the road; and the fugitive ran straight along one of these narrow green lanes. The town was stifling, but here among the tens of thousands of tall, close ranked canes it was strangling, like the air of an oven. And it was rank with the reek of the black, heavily manured, fortune bearing old soil. The fugitive gasped for breath, stumbled and fell, scrambled up, choking, and ran on, his scanty clothing sodden with sweat and blood.

Big Tom saw Griffon take to the canes,

but he did not enter that airless swelter of vegetation himself. He knew that the white man would hold that line as straight and far into the hills as obstacles and fatigue would permit. He turned to the left and raced along the road at amazing speed for a distance of fifty yards or so, then leaped the ditch and slipped into the maze of shadows and starshine of a grove of limes. Here he had clean turf under his feet, and ran with undiminished speed.

Griffon staggered out of the canes at last and flopped in a patch of cassava. He lay still for a full minute, then again rallied his exhausted body and reeling brain, scrambled to his feet and moved on at a lurching jog. Beyond the cassava the ground began that upward slope which led eventually to the hanging jungles and deep ravines of the mountains.

He blundered through a thicket of bay trees and essayed the gentle slant of turf beyond, only to fall with a spinning of stars in his eyes and the thumping of his overforced heart in his ears. The spinning stars passed, and consciousness with them. . . . He felt a hand on his shoulder. Caught! And he was unarmed! Back to old Caleb Stave! Back to slavery of spirit and body! He groaned like a lost soul.

"Peter, Peter," said a voice he knew. "I's tied up yer shoulder. Sit ye up, Peter, an' try a sip ob dis yere brandy."

"Is it you, Tom? For God's sake, let me go!" whispered Griffon, without raising his head.

"Let ye go? Man alive, I'se goin' myself! Try a suck at dis yere bottle, boy, an' den git yer legs under yerself an' come along."

"Where to?"

"To the mountuns, Peter. To de blessed jungles."

Griffon gulped at the bottle which Big Tom held to his lips—a bottle stolen from Caleb Stave's best bin. He got his legs under him then and came slowly to his feet with the African's help. They went up the gradual slope together at a fair rate of speed, the black man's strong right arm about the white man's waist. Thus they passed Fort Royal Hill, well to the left of it. They skirted sloping crops—sugar cane,

cassava, Guinea corn and tobacco—and beyond the cultivation got into a gully which climbed steeply between water-cut banks fringed with wild bush. In the time of rain this gully runs full with earth reddened water which stains the clear sea greens and sea blues hundreds of yards from shore; but now it was dry, save for a few still pools with finger wide trickles of water between.

"Let me rest a minute," said Griffon. "I'm spent—bled white—legs gone and lungs afire."

Big Tom eased him down to the ground and stood above him, hearkening with bowed head to the faint sounds of the night.

"I was afraid of you, Tom—but I trust you now," said Griffon.

"Trust me, dat's right!" returned Big Tom. "You an' me's in de same boat now, Peter. It 'll be de whip an' hot iron if dey catches us!"

"They'll never take me alive! Damn Caleb Stave!"

They resumed their journey up the rugged gully. Griffon was still too weak to do much in the way of locomotion for himself. He leaned heavily back against Big Tom's brawny right arm, and his knees sagged at every step. But the African seemed tireless.

"I must rest again," said Griffon. "Must have lost quarts of blood."

"Nope, we best keep a-goin'," replied Tom, lifting the other easily in both arms and moving steadily onward.

After ten minutes, Griffon spoke again.

"There's no chance for us," he said. "They'll catch us in a day or a week, dead or alive. They'll hunt us with dogs—and every cursed planter in the island will join in the hunt. The masters and the soldiers will hunt us; and our own kind will help track us and drag us down—the white slaves and the black."

"Maybe we give 'em de slip, Peter. We am still alive, anyhow."

"Don't you feel a temptation to take me back to Stave? They'd not lay lash nor hot iron on you if you took me back, Tom."

The African halted at that, and set the white man on his feet before him.

"Ye don't trust me, Peter?"

"But—don't you see we haven't a chance! Don't you see your only chance?"

"Maybe not much—but I take it with yerself, Peter—death or freedom!"

"Why?"

"Big Tom am yer friend, white boy!"

"I believe you—but you're mad to risk torture for my sake! Here's your knife."

"Where ye come by that knife, Peter?"

"I took it out of your belt when you held the bottle to my lips away back there down the hill. If you'd gone *down* instead of up, Tom—or so much as turned once in your tracks—well, I'm a desperate man."

"Trust Big Tom an' take anudder pull on dis yere bottle, white boy."

The bed of the vanished torrent became steeper and rougher and narrower, deeply pitted here and there and frequently barricaded with overhanging ledges of rock. Griffon struggled upward manfully, with Big Tom's arm behind him at the difficult places, for a sweltering half hour; and then he fell again. The African shouldered him like a sack of corn and continued the ascent.

Big Tom left the ravine an hour later, scrambling up the left bank with Peter Griffon still across his right shoulder. The jungle bulged against him as if it would roll him back into the gully; but he fastened upon its front of tough vines with his left hand, hung on, dragged forward, set his great feet securely, ripped an opening, and thrust himself and his burden in.

Here was no starshine nor moving air. The place was like the interior of a baker's oven for both blackness and heat. But the gigantic slave pressed forward, inward. He shifted and lowered poor Griffon from his shoulder to his arms, clasped him to his heaving breast, turned then and presented his back to the tangle. By sheer weight and strength he burst his way backward into the maze of vegetation for a distance of several yards. Vines snapped near and far, and lost their holds with rips and rendings to right and left and high and low, as if the whole wood were coming down. Big Tom was delighted with himself at these indications of his physical prowess.

"Bust 'im, boy! Bust 'im!" he mut-

tered. "You am more powerfuller nor dis yere jungle, Big Tom Samson! Rip 'im down, black boy!"

But, after a few yards, the jungle held him. He was forced to drop Griffon and turn and cut thick cables of vine with his knife.

Even Big Tom's herculean limbs and lungs of leather succumbed at last, for a time, to the vast and continuous pressure of the jungle's resistance. He crumpled; and before he could regain his feet, sleep overcame him.

There was a twilight of filtered sunshine in the jungle when the runaways awoke. They were parched with thirst and hungry, and Griffon was faint and sore. The brandy bottle had been broken during the struggle inward from the gully. Big Tom searched about for food, slashing his way here and there, and in time found a mango tree. The fruit was ripe, the yellow pulp soppy with juice; and the fugitives sucked eagerly, fairly guzzled, despite the overwild turpentine flavor. For hours after that they pushed along, higher into the mountains and deeper into the jungle, Big Tom cutting and bursting the way, and Peter Griffon following weakly.

Their track through the rosy browns and massed greens closed behind them and vanished like the wake of a diver in green water. They rested often. The air was sweltering and a cloud of insects hummed about them. Big Tom covered the blood-soaked rags on his companion's shoulder with a pad of wide green leaves.

"I been dis far once before," he said, as they lay gasping.

Griffon moved his head, as an indication that he had heard, but neither opened his eyes nor spoke.

"Come man huntin'," continued Big Tom. "Dat was before Stave take me from my old master for bad debt—three years ago, maybe. We chase runaway boy named Henry dat time—chase 'im with blood-hound dogs from Monkey Hill. I know Henry. Good boy, dat Henry—but he kick overseer in de belly one day an' run away. Dey figger to whip 'im to death for dat—for he was sickly—not worth much money. I get big start on dem dogs, outrun all

hands, an' find Henry round yere somewheres. Den up come one big dog—an' I kill 'im. Up come t'other big dog—an' I kill dat one too, with ma banda. Den I give Henry some bread an' water I carry—an' go 'way back an' way over yonder an' holler an' bust about. Dey don't find dem dogs—never."

Griffon sat up and opened his eyes.

"And Henry?" he asked. "Did they find him—dead or alive?"

"Don't never find 'im, dead nor alive," replied the other.

"Dead, nevertheless—of starvation or fever—as we shall be dead in a few days."

"Nope. I see 'im one day—maybe one year ago—in Crabhole Alley. He looks like old, old woman, in white skirts an' big yaller handkerchief, with big basket, cryin' sweet cakes to sell. I know ber for Henry by the look outen ber eye an' a crook o' one finger she make to me—but a white man walk close behind me, so I don't stop. An' when I come back she wasn't to be spied nowhere in Crabhole Alley."

They resumed the struggle against the jungle. Thirst and hunger burned and gnawed them. Big Tom made blind strokes with his knife, fumbling strokes. Griffon babbled of other days, of apples and cider and old trees with mistletoe in their branches. He fell frequently and cursed Big Tom every time for picking him up. At last Big Tom let him lie, regarded him helplessly for a few seconds, and then lay down beside him. The knife that had slashed so far into the jungle's tough heart slipped unheeded from the black fingers.

Big Tom was not beaten, however. He got to his feet again hours later, picked up his knife and his unconscious companion, and renewed the unequal conflict. He bucked the jungle desperately, with his friend in his arms. He burst through a screen of vines.

## II.

PETER GRIFFON was aware of being carried, but thought nothing of it. Later he felt a breath of wind on face and body. He was dully conscious of being lowered and tenderly deposited on something softer than the ground; but it was not until his

head was raised and he felt the moist rim of a cup set against his lips that he paid much attention to what was happening. He drank deep of the cool water, and then opened his eyes.

He was in a rustic shelter which stood open to the front, open to an invigorating bustle of sea breeze in drooping foliage and flashes and glimmers of the sea beyond. He heard the roll and burst and welter of surf far below him. On his right sat Big Tom, an earthen bowl between his knees from which he scooped hot morsels of baked yam and baked fish with greedy fingers. On his left, still, with a supporting arm back of him, knelt the man who had given him water. He was white, but where sun and wind had worked on him he was tanned to the hue of an old belt. Blue eyes shone out of his weathered mask with startling pallor and fire. He was shaved clean, chin and cheek and lip.

He was not a young man, and yet even in repose he had not the air of an old one. His face was netted with fine wrinkles and the skin of his hands was also wrinkled and appeared to be too large for the flesh and bones within.

"Who are you?" asked Griffon.

"A friend," answered the other. "No slave owner nor magistrate nor man hunter. Ye played in luck, lad, when ye tumbled head first onto the rocks o' me own little water hole. Lay back now an' I'll fetch 'e some good broth."

He lowered Griffon's head and went nimbly from the shelter, light on his feet as a cat, but queerly stooped from the hips. Griffon felt an upflame of hope. He rolled over onto his sound shoulder and eyed Big Tom, who was now polishing the empty dish.

"Who is he, Tom?" he asked. "And where are we?"

"Dat the man we need most in dis whole island," replied the revived giant. "Sailor Penny am his name. Henry tell me. He find dat poor black boy Henry three years ago; an' Henry find us down by de water hole dis mornin', where we fall outer de jungle onto our heads."

"Henry? The runaway slave they were going to whip to death?"



Big Tom nodded.

"So it was him you saw in Crabhole Alley, rigged up like an old woman?"

The other nodded again; and at that moment Sailor Penny entered the shelter with a steaming bowl in his hands. Big Tom sniffed and rolled his eyes.

"No more for 'e yet a while," said the oldish man in the tone of a nurse to a greedy child. "Not quite enough be better nor a gorge for a flappin' belly—but I'll maybe give 'e a roasted fowl in an hour or two, or some such trifle."

He fed the hot broth to Griffon with a wooden spoon. It was masterly broth, comforting the stomach and tingling along the arteries like wine. After swallowing the last drop of it and licking the spoon, Griffon lay flat again and slept.

He awoke an hour later and found himself alone in the rustic shelter. He sat up. He was his own man again, save for the small matter of a soreness and stiffness in his bandaged shoulder. He looked at the thatched roof and the frail walls of woven palm leaves and wondered at the fragile character of the place. Two low pallets made up of dried grasses and folded pieces of old sailcloth comprised the furnishings. He was still wondering when Sailor Penny entered, slipping in from the sunshine with that queer stoop which gave him an appearance of eager haste.

"Feelin' brisker, mate?" he asked, squatting close in front of the fugitive.

"A thousand times better, in mind an' in body," replied Griffon. "You have saved my life. Nay, you have given me life! For there is no life in slavery."

"Handsomely spoke," returned the other. "Drink this."

Griffon drained the cup obediently. The draft was bitter, but cool and not unpleasant.

"Where is Big Tom?" he asked.

"Somewheres below ground, with Henry."

"A cave?"

"Aye, ye may say so. I trust ye, mate—by yer eyes. An' I trust Tom for what Henry tells of 'im. But ye hail from a bad quarter, lad—a tricky quarter."

"Meaning Crabhole Alley?"

"Meanin' the shop an' sarvice o' Caleb Stave."

"Tricky! Man, if you knew him as I do, ye'd lay a stronger word on him. Listen to me, Master Penny—an' make what you choose of it! If I saw old Caleb Stave staggering an' tottering on the edge of the red hot pit of everlasting damnation, yelling for help, and it was in my power to pluck him to safety—I'd push him in—so hear me God Almighty!"

For several seconds the two men stared at each other in silence.

"Hah!" breathed the elder, dimming the blue blaze of his eyes and relaxing the lines of mouth and jaw. "I believe 'e, mate. Ye know 'im! Tell me why ye hate 'im so."

Griffon, too, relaxed suddenly in attitude and manner and expression of face. He glanced around him.

"But are we safe here?" he whispered. "What if they've laid the hounds on our scent? We lie here defenseless."

The other smiled and shook his head.

"Ye be safe here, lad—safe as the governor in his great house on Fort Royal Hill," he said.

So Griffon told him. He had been in Caleb Stave's service, at Caleb Stave's mercy, these past three years. These were the last years of the term of ten for which he had been transported to the plantations. He said nothing just then of the seven preceding years of his slavery, beyond mentioning the fact that he had been sold into Stave's hands from the island of St. Kitt's. He told only of the bitter nightmare of his relations with the ship-chandler of Crabhole Alley.

It had speedily become evident to him that Stave was dissatisfied with his bargain. The truth of that matter had soon come to light. Stave had made a mistake. He had purchased three years of Griffon's indentured slavery under the misapprehension that he was acquiring the expert services of one Grissin, a cutpurse and house-breaker. Upon learning that his servant had never cut a purse or picked a lock, he had heaped indignities and cruelties on him, at the same time leading others to believe that the poor devil was in reality the ruf-

man whom he himself had thought and hoped him to be at the time of the purchase. Himself hating Griffon for his honesty, he had caused others to despise and distrust the unfortunate servant for the lack of it.

That was Caleb Stave. That was ever Caleb Stave's way. He had given the poor dog a bad name even while humiliating, overworking, starving and whipping him for being an honest dog.

Caleb Stave had a granddaughter in his house. She was an orphan. She was young and innocent and also beautiful and kind. For months she had looked upon Griffon with fear and distaste; but in the course of time with pity, despite his black reputation; and at last, after hearing something of the truth, she had looked upon him with kindness.

The ship-chandler had smelled out the situation and given it his close and crooked attention. He had seen in it an opportunity for the kind of double play in which his verminous soul delighted. So he had gone softly about it; and next morning the girl had run to him with the startling information that most of her trinkets were missing from her treasure box, the inadequate lock of which had been burst. Stave had called Griffon to him and, despite the girl's protests, had accused the outcast of the theft.

Griffon had stared dazedly, not knowing exactly what to deny; whereupon the old devil had plucked and torn at the unfortunate's scanty and ragged clothing and brought to light two or three of the missing trinkets. Griffon had flared out at that recklessly, denied the theft and any knowledge of it with curses, and named the old man for a rogue, a cheat, a liar, a coward, and a being so vile in himself and so low in his dirty gutter origin as to be scarcely human. And he had shaken his fist in his master's face and cried some foolishness about his own quality of blood and ancestry.

He had played the outraged gentleman for a minute or two, poor devil. His words and his scorn had succeeded in cutting Stave to the quick, and for his success he had been held by one negro and whipped by another until he fainted, while the old man forced the girl to look on.

Griffon's lot had been harder after that. He had been worked to the bone and underfed. He had been steadily worn down in body from strength to quivering weakness; and every effort had been made to wear down his spirit as well, and his mind, or break them utterly.

He had been set to the most humiliating, the most degrading tasks, thrashed and jeered at by his master and the Spanish mulatto foreman. So nearly had his courage been broken that he had once tried to take his own life. His shaking hand had saved him. He had been doctored for the wound, fed back to a degree of strength, and then whipped to unconsciousness. That had taught him a lesson—and his next effort with the knife had been directed against the Spanish mulatto. In this also he had failed; and for the attempt he had been beaten with a supplejack.

Things had improved for him soon after that, despite Stave's best efforts to break his manhood. The mulatto, who was a free-man, had been killed in a drunken brawl on the water front. Then the girl had discovered her lost trinkets one day in her grandfather's bedroom, at the bottom of a box in which he kept his private store of liquor. She had told Griffon and begged his forgiveness for ever having doubted his honesty—but she feared to tell the old man. Her sympathy had lightened Griffon's spiritual and mental darkness; and then Big Tom, who had been bought to replace the deceased free mulatto, had shown him surreptitious kindness.

Griffon leaned forward and grasped one of his attentive host's thin wrists with his clawlike right hand. His eyes glowed.

"Stave accused me of robbing him!" he exclaimed in a hate bitten whisper. "I was within a few days of my freedom. A lie, to save himself and damn me! Another double trick, to save himself and enslave me forever! But I was helpless. Who will believe a slave? So I struck him down and ran. I downed him with a bag of yams. Listen! *I knew enough to hang him*; but I ran for my freedom. For who would have believed what I could tell? Or even if one had believed, would he admit it? The slave against the master!

"The soldiers and constables were searching every house and shop for jewels and money robbed from Fort Royal. They had been at it night and day. They came to Crabhole Alley, smashing doors and ripping beds, poking everywhere, tearing up floors, prodding holes in yards and gardens—and they were at Caleb Stave's front door. D'ye see it? Listen to me! I knew the truth—the truth to hang him—but I was helpless!

"He had yelled of robbery that morning, as soon as the constables came into the alley—of the robbery of his strong box—and now he named me for the thief—and the soldiers at the door! D'ye see it. So I ran—for I'd have been found twice guilty had I tried to show his guilt—for he had buried his own strong box in the earth under the floor of that stinking shop—along with the bags of jewels and gold which he had robbed from the governor's house! Now d'ye get it? D'ye understand?

"First, he had robbed the governor and hidden the stuff—but that I did not see. Next, when the search drew near, he was afraid and hid some of his own money, in his own strong box, with the other—and that I saw, spying on him through a crack. And then he yelled that he'd been robbed. That was to draw off the hunt from his shop. Then he brought the hunters to his door and named me for a thief. D'ye see it?"

"But if ye'd showed 'em—"

"If I'd shown them—man, don't you see it yet? Would magistrates believe my tale, think you?—that the old devil had robbed himself? No! I'd be punished for both robberies. Hanged. And the governor would reward Caleb Stave."

"I git it, mate. Now tell me this. Did Stave know that ye knew about 'im—that ye spied on him?"

"He didn't know it. He doesn't know it."

"Not about ye knowin' where he buried the blunt?"

"No, for a certainty! He didn't catch me spying. I didn't tell him what I knew. I gave him the lie and ran for it. He had accused me just to break me—and to save himself if the stuff should be found by any chance. A double play, you see."

"Aye, double an' deep. Deep as hell. An' the blunt, mate? Where would it be now?"

"Where I saw it. He won't shift it till the danger's past."

Sailor Penny nodded reflectively, then went away and soon returned with another bowl of invigorating broth.

### III.

BEFORE sunset, Sailor Penny took Peter Griffon to the edge of the cliff before the shelter and pointed downward. Griffon saw a strip of still water about one hundred yards in width and three times as long at the foot of the cliff. This was sheltered from the outer commotion by a crescent of black reef against which the seas rocked up and rode straight and burst to froth as white as snow. Midway the reef, where it was highest and widest, squatted a fragment of an old hulk—twenty feet or so of stove keel, unplanked ribs crusted with shells and weeds, a ragged butt of bowsprit and a stump of foremast.

"It be a proper island at neap, an' no more nor a strip at full an' all a-wash at flood," said Penny. "I've set here many's the time for hours o' moonlit nights picturin' Caleb Stave on that there reef without boat nor raft to bring 'im off."

"You have?" queried Griffon, surprised. "So you know him, too?"

"I've heard tell of 'im from more nor yerself, mate, up an' down the islands these many years, ashore an' afloat. He'd look uncommon well on that there reef without raft nor boat, blast his fishy deadlights!"

"He'd swim ashore. You don't know the inhuman beastliness of that old man, or ye'd wish him worse than that, as I do. I wish him in hell! He's had me in hell, down in the red hot slime of it, these three years, torturing me soul and body. That's where I wish Caleb Stave—for a thousand years!"

"He wouldn't swim ashore, no fear! Sharks, me lad! They be down there a-plenty. I encourages 'em. He'd find Crab Reef hell enough."

"You would starve him? Good!"

"Nay, he wouldn't starve."

"Not starve? What then?"

"That be an uncommon bit o' reef, lad. I've seen the same north about the Tortugas. But come along now an' I'll show 'e somethink else afore dark."

He led the way back to the shelter, went to the rear of it and thrust a hand up into the thatch. A flake of dull metallic surface was exposed to view.

"What is it?" asked Griffon, who was beginning to entertain suspicions of Sailor Penny's mental condition.

"A pewter dish," answered Penny. "A lookout farrard. A sentinel. Safety."

Griffon smiled indulgently and shook his head.

"It shows from the outside, broad an' bright," continued the other. "But only from one angle. Over yonder scouts the Turtle, along me brook an' strip o' clearance, from sunup to sundown—an' he knows the angle. If he sights a stranger, up he climbs into the highest o' the right trees, up to the angle for a glimpse o' this here pewter dish, an' takes a shoot at it. Maybe two o' us be settin' here in the cool—or three, maybe—when *ping* goes the pewter dish, an' down we goes underground, leavin' nothink for a stranger to see save this here old shelter what a shipwrecked sailor might rig an' sleep under a night or two."

Griffon was impressed and puzzled.

"But the turtle? What d'ye mean by a turtle climbing trees?"

"Injun. Carib. Good lad, the Turtle—an' smart as paint."

"Ah! An aborigine. What does he shoot with?"

"Me own cross-bow, the best that ever sped iron tipped quarrel. I took it off a Flemming shipmaster years ago. It shoots farther an' truer nor dag or pistolet, an' without the bang. An' now I'll show 'e somethink else."

They left the shelter and entered the edge of the jungle at a point about twenty yards away. Sailor Penny lay flat and wriggled forward beneath the tangle a distance of six or eight yards. Griffon followed him close. Penny got to his feet and climbed into the branches of a tree of dense growth and low branches, disappearing in a few seconds in the upper tangle of green and

brown. Griffon followed slowly, with considerable difficulty.

He reached a narrow platform of sticks lashed securely together to form an aerial den in the upper depths of green obscurity and jungle mystery. There Penny was waiting for him and led him halfway around the tree trunk on foot ropes of living vines reinforced with cordage, and along a horizontal limb on hands and knees, where they were enveloped in screens of hanging tangle. Penny swung beneath the limb on the twisted jungle net, went down hand under hand and in a second was swallowed from Griffon's sight. Griffon followed, awkwardly because of his disabled left arm. But the descent was not difficult, for good hemp cordage was rove among the vines and ratlines were set as in a ship's shrouds.

He sank into a dense tide of snarled vegetation and found Penny waiting for him again among the roots of things, in a space circumscribed as a ship's fore-castle hatch, walled and roofed with foliage and stem and tendril. The only light was an amber dusk from high overhead. Penny chuckled, stooped, fumbled at the ground for a second, then raised the lid of a black hole.

"The after hatch," he said, swinging it lightly up and back until it reclined against the jungle wall. He lowered himself into the hole shoulder deep; Griffon joined him there; whereupon Penny reached over and brought the light, hinged door of wicker work and woven grass into place above their bowed heads.

Sailor Penny had an extraordinary establishment underground, which he shared with an extraordinary company. Here was a cave in the living rock older than humanity and almost as crooked as the ways of Caleb Stave, with a seaweed vent halfway up the face of the seventy-foot cliff. This vent, a horizontal crack in the rock, had been originally of considerable extent, but had been filled up with roughly dressed stone from both ends to within six feet of the center.

This aperture, as wide as a gate, but no more than two feet high, was hidden from seaward eyes—so Penny said—by a narrow ledge just below it across the face of the cliff and a thin veil of creepers pendent from

above. It stood wide open to a drift of salty breeze when Griffon first glanced through it at the dimming sea and the first stars; but a moment later, at a word from Penny, two black fellows closed it with a grating of oak and rusty iron.

"D'ye fear an attack from the sea to-night?" asked Griffon.

"Aye, we'll be attacked to-night, same as usual," replied Penny casually.

"Same as usual? I thought this a secret stronghold!"

"Aye, secret enough from our human enemies."

Again Griffon felt a doubt of the old man's sanity; and, at the same moment, a daunting sensation of chilliness between his shoulder blades and up the back of his neck. He cast an apprehensive glance at the grating and the fast deepening night beyond it.

"But what else d'ye fear?" he asked with scores of old tales of sea devils and sea ghosts stirring in his mind.

Sailor Penny ignored the question, took him by a hand and led him back to an inner chamber of the cave. Here, against one rocky wall and screened by hanging mats of woven grass, burned a clear fire beneath two iron pots. The thin smoke from the firm, dry fuel crept up a vertical crevice in the wall and vanished in the gloom high overhead. The runaway slave named Henry was in attendance upon the pots; and Big Tom and two other negroes and a small man as dark as they, but thin featured and straight haired, squatted close at hand.

This last was the Turtle, the Carib, the watchman with the Flemish cross-bow. The strange blacks were runaway slaves from the south side of the island, who had escaped to Sailor Penny's sanctuary three months before.

"I've had as many as eight below hatches here at the one time, not countin' the Turtle," explained Penny. "Eight runaways, an' two of 'em 'dentured white men like yerself, mate. One o' that lot died for lack o' the blood he lost breakin' away."

"What became of the others?" asked Griffon.

"I got 'em clean off—but me signal was flyin' nigh onto a month before I could ship

'em. Some of 'em be coral now, like enough, an' some of 'em under overseers' lashes agin, maybe—but I done me best—give 'em their freedom an a clean run to bold it."

"You shipped them away from her?"

"Aye, an' dozens afore that lot an' maybe a dozen since. I been here fifteen years, lad."

"And yet you've not escaped yourself?"

"Escaped! I be a free man, mate—me own master!"

"Yet you remain here in hiding and savor runaway slaves at risk of your life!"

"A diversion, lad. It passes the time o' waitin'. Henry, serve the stew."

Griffon asked more questions of his host during supper, but failed to get anything better than a wag of the head for answer; and immediately after supper he was shown to a far corner of the cave, where a thin mattress was spread for him beside Penny's couch. He lay down and was within a blink of sleep when he was disturbed by the poke of a finger in the ribs.

"Where were 'e when 'e seen Stave bury the blunt?" whispered Penny.

"In the loft," he replied impatiently, longing to resign himself to the sweet, light pressure on lids and brain.

"An' ye seen him lift the floor an' bury it in a corner?"

"Yes. Nay, not in a corner. Behind the counter—midway—with coils of rope atop."

#### IV.

BOTH Sailor Penny and Henry were gone from the cave when Peter Griffon awoke from his first night of slumber in that queer sanctuary. Though he ached from scalp to heel, he felt a new kick of life in him.

Big Tom brought him breakfast and bathed and dressed his shoulder. When he went to the front of the cave he found the sun high and the grating removed from the long window. It was then that Big Tom told him that their host and Henry had gone away at the first clear break of daylight, and that all hands, with the exception of the Turtle, were to remain underground until their return, by Master Penny's orders.

Griffon was startled by an unpleasant suspicion.

"Would he play us false?" he whispered.

"No fear o' dat," replied Tom. "What for would he make known all de secret ways o' dis yere cave to us if he didn't mean to act honest by us?"

"And why not, if he shipped us far enough away? He said he had shipped dozens like us, white and black, out of the island. D'y'e think he goes to all this bother and labor and danger for the love of poor devils like you and me?"

"But Henry say dey goes free. De old man don't sell 'em. Henry make one v'yage himself, two years ago. He go away free and be come hack free six months later."

"And what manner of voyage was that?"

Big Tom did not know. Henry had not given a clear account of the trip, having no appetite for the sea and its roaring perils. He had been glad to get back to Master Penny with a whole skin and two handfuls of gold.

"There you have it!" exclaimed Griffon. "Freedom! Aye, freedom with a vengeance—until ye're sped in a bloody fight or taken alive and hanged by the neck. Two handfuls of gold! Don't you see it, Tom? It's the buccaneers who take Penny's runaways off his hands! The buccaneers—and they're naught but murdering pirates nowadays!"

Big Tom accepted this disclosure calmly. Griffon was dejected. He saw himself helpless between an ignominious death on one hand and an unthinkable life of brutality on the other. For the glory of the old buccaneers, of the Free Companions, was a thing of the past. That hardy and desperate fellowship had preyed upon Spain, upon the proud and ruthless enemy of England and humanity—but those days and conditions were gone, and the old name was now applied to crews of beasts as devoid of courage as of mercy.

Twice during the day the two fugitives attempted to leave the cave by the way they had entered, but each time they found the Turtle with his cross-bow on guard at the mouth of the tunnel; and each time the Carib had turned them back with a gesture of the hand and a shoot of the eye not

to be denied. They considered the seaward vent as a way of escape. They could easily have reached the narrow ledge by way of the crack in the face of the cliff, and with the help of a rope they could have descended from the ledge to the lagoon—but, as they were without a boat of any sort, all that would have been worse than useless.

The day passed without the return of Sailor Penny and Henry. The Turtle came below at sunset and took command. The heavy grating was again placed in the aperture overlooking the sea and the black reef, and the evening meal was cooked and eaten.

Peter Griffon retired early, but he did not sleep. For a long time he lay still, hearing nothing but the snores and snorts of his slumbering companions. Then he left his couch and moved noiselessly about the caves. He became aware of a faint pulsing sound, light on the ear, but large on the mind like the running and pounding of surf greatly muffled; and for a time he believed it to be the voice of the sea's commotion out in front along the base of the cliff and the reef beyond. But he changed his mind. It did not come from the front—or not entirely so, at least—but from beneath. It pulsed under his feet, under the floor of rock on which he stood, telling of a second and lower cave into which the tide rolled.

"That's their water gate, their sallyport, and doubtless they have a safe way down to it and boats hidden somewhere," he told himself.

It did not interest him particularly, for he had no intention of attempting to escape just then in an open boat. He would wait to learn more of this Sailor Penny and his subterranean ways.

He moved toward the front of the cave and presently heard another sound ahead. He paused for a moment, then continued his advance with the utmost caution. The sound grew as he approached the grated seaward aperture. It was a composite sound, made up of crackings and rattlings and harsh scrapings; and he thought of the nightly attack from the sea of which Sailor Penny had spoken, and all the old tales he had ever heard of sea devils and the like flashed across his mind.

He paused again and struggled for the space of half a dozen quickened heart beats with a frantic impulse to retreat to the farthest corner of the cave and his snoring companions; but he mastered this cowardly impulse and went forward again.

He looked for a faint gleam of starshine at the grated vent, but he could not see it. He continued to advance toward the appalling and mysterious confusion of sounds until they seemed to arise from within a yard or two of him; and at the same moment an almost overpowering stench of deep sea things assailed his nostrils and hreathed coldly and clammy on his face—the stench and hreath of watery depths, of weed sodden with the undertows of a thousand tides, of harnacles and rotted wreckage and salty slime and death.

He stood his ground, though he wavered and swayed for a moment. He caught a gleam of starshine close in front of him, but it vanished in a fraction of a second. He caught another, which was gone as swiftly as the first. Then he realized that *things*—the devil only knew what manner of things!—filled the seaward vent of the cave, fighting and clawing at the grating of rusty iron.

Peter Griffon sank to his knees, unnerved by a sickening horror. Wild conjectures surged through his shuddering mind; but he did not retreat; and presently he mastered his horror sufficiently to raise and advance his hand and a short stick he held toward the point where he knew the grating stood securely wedged in its frame of rock. He felt the iron bars—and other things as hard—but alive!—things as hard as the iron which moved beneath the point of his stick.

He jabbed the stick frantically here and there through the grating, and at every jab something loosed and fell and he heard a thud on the rocky ledge below; and at every thrust a shining gap of starlight appeared for a moment against the grating—a gap almost as wide as a cavalier's hat. The gaps were obliterated, refilled, as fast as he made them; and soon, his arm work slackening in speed, the stick was gripped and all but snatched from his hand.

He yanked hard on it, yanked and pulled until it came away with a tearing sound.

He felt the end of it with his fingers and found the tough wood shredded like hair for a distance of four or five inches from the tip.

Then he knew. These monsters against whom the seaward entrance to the cave was so strongly barred every night were giant crabs. He had heard gruesome tales of certain reefs and keys of the Tortugas to the north, to which just such beasts as these swarmed up every night from black depths, whereon bones of men who had been cast ashore alive and dead lay white as new coral. He remembered one tale of a big negro who had been dragged to earth and killed and stripped of his flesh in the sight and hearing of a canoe load of would-be rescuers. Now he understood the significance of Sailor Penny's remarks concerning the reef. It was a comfort to know that Penny was not crazy.

Peter returned to his mat and slept until aroused by the good scents of yams and fish roasting and broiling for breakfast.

## V.

ANOTHER day passed, and another night, before the reappearance of Sailor Penny and his man Henry. The manner of their return was surprising to Peter and Big Tom.

The inmates of the cave had been awake only a few minutes, and the fire of dry vines had just begun to flame and crackle beneath the pot when a shrill whistle from somewhere underfoot caused the Turtle to lay aside his culinary tasks and hasten toward the front of the cave. The others followed him. When halfway to the seaward window—from which the grating had not yet been removed for the day—he stepped aside to a shadowy recess in the left-hand wall. He reappeared in a second with the end of a stout rope, to which a large iron hook was attached.

He stooped to the center of the floor of smooth rock, brushed a layer of stone dust away and lifted an iron ring from a little hole in the rock. Into this ring he slipped the book. Then, after waving the curious spectators back from the center of the floor, he retired again into the dusky

recess; and, next moment, they heard the creaking of a windlass, and then beheld a great square of the floor, a hatch of rock, rise slowly to a sound of grinding hinges.

The first thing to appear from those black depths—from which arose the slosh and sob of uneasy waters over weedy rocks—was the woolly pate of Henry. The rest of him followed swiftly. He bore on his back a light bundle wrapped in water-proofed canvas and securely tied. Sailor Penny rose close on his heels, empty handed, smiling genially around at the astonished company.

After breakfast Penny took Griffon forward to the crack in the living rock overlooking the lagoon and the reef and the bright sea beyond. He smoked tobacco, not in a pipe, but in a long roll of leaf after the Spanish style, and seemed to be in a high humor.

"We dealt yer enemy a rude shog, me lad," he said. "Even now Crabhole Alley rings from end to end with his lamentations, ye may lay to that! We robbed him of what's dearer to him nor his own immortal soul, did me an' Henry." At that he fell to chuckling; but suddenly his mood changed, his eyes darkened and his mouth hardened. "But the measure is not yet heaped to overflowin', the debt is not yet paid," he added grimly.

"What mischief have you done him?" asked Griffon.

"His gold and silver," returned the other. "For a piece of gold he would bear false witness against his brother; for a piece of silver he would cheat a friend; for a penny he would trick a blind beggar. We robbed him of his buried strong box and, along with it, of the treasure he stole from the governor, did me an' Henry. We found the blunt in the very spot you said, me lad."

Griffon stared at him, incredulous.

"And we digged it up," he continued. "Aye, an' we fetched it clean away—Caleb Stave's blood sweated money and the governor's bloody treasure!"

Griffon continued to stare, speechless, amazed. Sailor Penny waved a hand toward the sunshine and sea glimmer in front and below.

"And it lays there," he continued; "out

there on that sweet bit o' reef, with a patch o' sailcloth an' a few coral rocks to hold it down—all them broad pieces an' flashin' rich gems!"

"Out there?" queried Griffon in a dazed whisper. "On the reef?"

"Aye, lad, as sure as the whip o' the tyrant has run red with yer blood—as sure as you an' me be exiles from our sweet English places, bidin' in our earths like hunted foxes—aye, as sure—" He ceased speaking, but continued to gaze out at the shine and glimmer with unwinking eyes.

"Is it true that you have robbed Stave?" asked the young man.

Penny turned to him and replied, smiling: "Have patience for a little while an' ye shall know. Ye shall see. The days of Caleb Stave are numbered. By his own black greed shall he be destroyed as surely as hell awaits him—as surely as he has proved faithless to every man who trusted him and blind and deaf to every one who ever asked mercy or succor of him."

"Who are you?" asked Griffon, strangely moved.

"A Berkshire man like yerself—aye, an' like Caleb Stave. Have ye forgot Pennyfold, the little farm on the downs? Griffon land, aye, but farmed by Pennies close onto two hundred years. Honest yeomen all—until the hunger for worldly place gripped my heart! I was an only child. I had schoolin' above my own father an' idleness above my station. I coursed hares on the downs with the squire's son. I was half a gentleman—God pity me! an' the ambition gripped me to be all of one. And the squire's son was my friend. He gave me money; an' so I went away from Berkshire an' clean away from old England to find a fortune.

"The master o' the first ship I sailed in was a thief an' a cheat—aye, an' worse—a *spirit*! He tricked fools into his power an' sold them to the plantations. He spirited away little English children an' sold them into slavery. But ye know the accursed breed of devil's whelps! His name was Hudderdin. He sold me in Virginia. I escaped within the year an' took to seafarin'. For twelve years I sailed those seas, an' south as far as Para, maybe, in divers com-



panies, or hid ashore in stinkin' jungles; an' in that time I saw Hudderkin walk the plank, screamin'—an' that's enough said o' that stage o' my career.

"I set up shopkeepin' in Port Royal. I waxed prosperous; I found me a wife, an' my fortune grew. And one day came a Berkshire man to my door, ragged an' robbed an' bleedin', beggin' sup an' crust an' shelter in the name of God's mercy—an' it was Caleb Stave, the son of Jerry Stave, the cobbler o' Wantage. Poor stuff, aye!—but a Berkshire man. Mean enough in the noses of honest yeomen Pennies but very dirt to the high Griffons. I mind him in the little hutch before his father's shop, an' me an' the squire's son ridin' hy.

"But I took him in like a brother. I clothed an' fed him. Later I gave him work an' wage. I trusted him. I made him a partner in my business. I withheld nothing from him of my past or present. And we prospered together for years. And then he was revealed to me all of a sudden, in a flash—the devil he was, the false friend, the trickster and liar!

"In that flash I saw myself childless and poor—for he had estranged my children from me and robbed me of my worldly gear. I made to tear out his throat with my hands, but they dragged me away. Then he denounced me for a pirate an' sent for the constables an' the soldiers. But I escaped; an' for years I was back at the old life—the narrow seas an' stinkin' cricks an' jungles high an' low.

"The rich trader, Caleb Stave, moved from Port Royal. I know naught o' what he fell my deluded children. But one day I found Caleb Stave on this island, in Crabhole Alley. That was years and years ago—but it won't be much longer, lad. Then we'll return to our sweet green places in Berkshire, Master Penny to Pennyfold and Squire Griffon to Danes's Ride an' High Hall an' Griffonstun an' Bustard Chase—for that first an' best friend o' mine was yer own dear father!"

"Bustard Chase," echoed Griffon, his voice shaken with yearning. "Danes's Ride, Griffonstun, High Hall. Man, you name the dead! There is no acre of Griffon land now under all the titles of those

dear names. They all passed from us in the twinkling of an eye—nay, say rather in the flash of an ax edge! My poor father, that friend of your youth, made enemies high at court. - They were land hungry and he was blood proud. He is a proud man, or else a very saint, who bows only to God Almighty. My father bowed only to God, and yet he was no saint. They goaded him to rashness, to defiance, to the utterance of wild and violent words at home and at court—and at last to a thing to which they gave the name of high treason. I was soldiering in Flanders when my father's head fell in the tower. I went home and faced his murderers—and you see me now!"

"I heard it," replied Sailor Penny. "I kept it clear in me mind an' hot in me heart. One o' them high murderers v'yaged abroad—an' him I sped with me own hand on a slippery deck. An' another died in his bed, I heard. An' now there sits a new king on England's throne. Have patience, lad. Scars heal, an' the sand runs out an' the glass is to turn once more, an' the wheel sags round."

## VI.

THREE days passed, during which time Sailor Penny did not say more than half a dozen words to Peter Griffon on any one occasion nor give a satisfactory answer to any one of a score of questions. They were uneventful days. Griffon and Big Tom were given several airings above ground, but always under the eye of Henry or the Turtle or Penny himself; and the seaward vent of the cave was grated against the hungry crabs each night; and good food was cooked and eaten daily in generous portions. Griffon's strength returned to him swiftly. On the morning of the fourth day, he awoke to discover Sailor Penny and Henry gone again.

Inspired by consuming curiosity and something greater and deeper to which he was unable to affix a name, Griffon kept watch for the return of the old man and Henry. Each night, as soon as his companions were sound asleep, he took his mat forward to within a yard of the grating; and there, between naps, he arose frequently

and prodded the great clawing crabs away from the iron bars and looked forth at the starlit lagoon and black reef. He always returned to his place at the back of the cave before dawn, so that the Turtle should not suspect his vigilant curiosity. Thus three nights of vigil passed without reward.

On the fourth night, late, having made himself a peephole with his stick in the wall of ravenous crabs for the tenth time, he glimpsed something unusual out in the starshine and pale fire of phosphorescent waters. It was a small boat drawing in to the seaward side of the reef. He had no more than glimpsed this thing than the cleared spot on the grating was refilled. Then he prodded with grim determination and frantic haste, knocking a great crab clear of the rusty iron at every prod. And then he became aware of an amazing thing. The crabs were all gone from the grating—which was a strange enough thing in itself—but, stranger still, *they did not return*. He could bear them scraping and scrambling down the face of the cliff.

Griffon looked out at the low black reef and the black boat beyond. The boat was close in against the tide washed coral. A man leaped from its bows to the reef, and the boat backed off. There looked to be something queer about the reef—or was it the starshine? It seemed to quiver from end to end, as if alive—to squirm, without shifting its position—to wrinkle its rough back in thousands of changing knobs and ridges. And what was wrong with the man who had leaped so eagerly ashore there but a moment before?

He staggered like a drunkard. He fell and staggered up again, screaming. His screams were of sheer horror. He sprang to the edge of the water, still screaming—but the boat continued to draw away from him. He ran heavily to the ridge of the reef, fell again, staggered up once more; and now he looked to be bulkier of outline—lumpy—distorted. Now there was agony as well as terror in his resounding outcry. He struggled toward the old hulk of wreckage as if seeking refuge, heavily, slowly, only to fall in a moment for the third and last time. His terrible screams ceased as suddenly as if a hand had been clamped

upon his mouth; the boat vanished in the hazy starshine; the black surface of the reef continued to quake and crawl.

## VII.

THE sun was above the sea's edge, and Griffon had fallen at last into uneasy sleep, when the occupants of the upper cave heard Sailor Penny's shrill signal from the watery cavern below. Griffon awoke and sprang to his feet. The windlass was manned, the stone hatch was raised.

Henry was the first to rise from the depths. He grinned around him, but there was a grayness in his black skin and a wild light of relief in his eyes. Without a word, he cast the hook clear of the ring in the stone and lowered it down the hole. He sent the Turtle back to the windlass with a wave of the hand.

"Hoist away!" rang the voice of Penny from the depths.

The windlass creaked and Henry steadied the ascending rope with his hands, leaning out over the open hatch. A package wrapped in wet sailcloth and strongly roped about came into view, topped the level of the floor and was dragged aside by Henry. It was small, but it was heavier than lead. Again the rope was lowered down the hatch to the unseen boat, and again came Sailor Penny's cry of "Hoist away!" Once more Henry leaned over and steadied the ascending rope with both hands.

This was a very different load from the first. This was no inanimate package done up in wet sailcloth, but a young woman seated in a light of rope. As she stepped upon the floor of the cave Peter Griffon cried out in a voice of incredulous joy, whereupon she ran to him and was clasped tight in his arms.

Then came Sailor Penny himself up from the weltering black depths by way of the sea ladder of rope and ratlines, bearing on his right shoulder an oblong box of red wood studded and banded with tarnished silver. He beamed at the assembled company. Only Griffon and the young woman did not see him, or if they saw him, did not heed him. He stepped over to them,

close to them, still holding the ornate box on his shoulder.

"Lad, ye've got yer Sally at last," he said. "An' no Stave trash neither. I larned the truth of it all last night. Who d'ye reckon ye be huggin' an' kissin', lad?"

"She's Sally! I don't care who else she is—what she is!" cried Griffon.

"She's the daughter o' my dead son," retorted the old man, with dignity. "A Penny; bonest old Berkshire yeoman stock; no dirty Stave trash; a Penny o' Pennyfold!"

The lovers paid no attention to him. The old man turned to the others, who observed him with round and devoted eyes. He lowered the box from his shoulder to the crook of his left arm.

"High gentility," he said, with a wag of his head toward Griffon. "I was horn an' raised on Griffon land. An' she'll be the lady o' Danes's Ride an' High Hall." He patted the box significantly. "The glass be turned, lads. The black crabs be fed. There'll be a good ship layin' off here any day now, to carry us home. The wheel sags round."

## VIII.

SAILOR PENNY and the Turtle and the blacks ate hearty breakfasts, Penny and Henry in particular devouring broiled snapper and roasted yams and plantains, and topping off with luscious mangoes and swigging rum and water with the air of men who had achieved a laudable task and deserved well of the world. Only Griffon and the girl were indifferent to the good food. Between the powerful emotions of joy and disgust, their appetites were entirely upset.

They sat side by side, hand in hand, now gazing each into the other's eyes, now whispering one into the other's ear words of bewildered and incredulous delight, now starting and trembling at a thought of the nature of Caleb Stave's death. They felt nothing of pity for that old beast—the Angel of Mercy himself would have felt no pity for that vile crusher of human hopes and breaker of human lives; but the memory of the screams they had heard, the one in the open boat and the other in the cave, shook them with loathsome horror.

Old Sailor Penny was in high spirits. The patience of long and perilous years was rewarded, the work of years was crowned, his dream through years of heart-ache and fear and humiliation and hardship was on the verge of realization. The score had been paid. Hell had been fed by way of the black reef. Hate was satisfied. The days of his exile were numbered and wealth was in his hand, and he saw the green Berkshire downs and the weathered thatches of Pennyfold again with eyes of youth.

Within a week or two, or a month at the most, a good ship would appear in the offing flying a signal. Fate, chance, luck—call it what you will—had played his game at the last with both hands. Not only was he himself avenged, but the son of the high and unfortunate friend of his youth was avenged. Not only was wealth recovered, but the daughter of his own son was discovered and reclaimed from the unknown. Not only had he retaken much of the worldly treasure of which Caleb Stave had robbed him years ago, but with it he had taken the far greater treasure of jewels which Stave had stolen from the governor. He was in high spirits.

Breakfast was finished and cleared away. The Turtle went aloft to gather fruit and vegetables and to scout around. Henry rolled over on his back and fell asleep; and, after regarding him admiringly for a few minutes, two others of the fugitives followed his example. Old Penny and the lovers and Big Tom moved to the front of the cave and made themselves comfortable on couches of old sails in the line of a breeze from the sea. The rusty grating had been removed from the long crack; and waves and sky flashed with celestial tints beyond the frame of dark rock. From their low seats nothing was to be seen of the tragic reef.

The old man's eyes were glistening as if he had never lost an hour's sleep in his life. His smile was as bright as his eyes. His leathery visage fairly shone with benevolence and content. He puffed on a thin roll of tobacco which he had lit before leaving the cooking fire, expelling the azure smoke through his nostrils. He took his granddaughter's disengaged hand in one

of his, laid it on a knee of his tarry breeches and patted it affectionately.

"Ye'll wed her, lad?" he queried, stooping forward and turning the twinkling glance of his startlingly blue eyes upon Peter Griffon.

"I—I believe—with reason, I trust—she will do me the honor of—becoming my wife," replied Griffon with embarrassed dignity.

Sailor Penny chuckled. "I have enough for us all, lad," he said. "I'll set ye up agin in the high place they dragged yer father down from in the days o' the old king. Pennyfold be all I want for meself—an' maybe a chair at the dinner table of High Hall."

"Is your wealth so great, my friend?" asked Griffon. "For I doubt if the usurpers will give up those broad lands without a struggle," he added.

"It is great enough, and there be a new king now on the throne. Aye, lad, it was considerable afore the last venture; and now with me own back from Caleb Stave—or sufficient to cover interest on it for all these years, anyhow—an' the grand treasure that chanced to fall along with, an' atop o' that, we be rich men, Master Peter Griffon."

"Your wealth is no affair of mine, except so far as your kind and generous heart may prompt you to befriend me with it. You have already proved a friend in need, and you were my father's friend; and I would no more question the sources of your riches than I would weigh your gold and silver and demand a portion of it for your son's daughter. I know that you come justly by the strong box of old Caleb Stave, to which same I pointed you the way, my friend. There was justice; and if you had his shop an' his ships an' all his household gear to boot, 'twould be no more than your honest due. But what of the treasure of gold and jewels from Fort Royal Hill—of the governor's fortune?"

"That, too, goes into our common purse, lad. The giant's share o' that will be for yerself an' yer lady—my Sally there—have no fear! Danes's Ride an' High Hall an' Griffonstun 'll find the old man at Pennyfold a generous gran'daddy, ye kin lay to

that! An' ye'll never hear me deny that it was yerself p'inted me the way to it along with the strong box o' Caleb Stave."

"But what right have we to the governor's gold and jewels?"

"What right? What right, d'ye say? God's mercy—d'ye ax me what right? The right o' the robbed ag'in' the robber! The right o' the weak ag'in' the strong! The only right by which an honest man can have an' hold—aye, or keep the blessed spark o' life behind his ribs—in this world o' cheats an' thieves an' tyrants an' slanderers an' murderers!"

"Nay—say rather the right by which usurpers now sit in the halls of my fathers! Had the jewels belonged to Stave, well and good; but his theft of them did not make them his. To rob him—yea, to bring him to his death—was justice. My temper and my conscience are with you to the hilt in that affair; but to strip of his fortune a man with whom you have no quarrel is an act which I hesitate to call by its true name to my dead father's friend."

Sailor Penny stared at the young man incredulously for a little while, then with shocked amazement, at last with choleric and sneering disgust. The hot blue fire of his eyes would have daunted a less valiant fellow than Peter Griffon. He uttered a string of blistering sea oaths, then paused to note the effect.

Griffon continued to eye him calmly; the girl sat with bowed head; Big Tom reclined on an elbow with his gaze on Griffon's face. The old man drew a breath and burst forth again, his lips twisting, his head and shoulders trembling.

"What do I hear?" he cried. "Afeared o' a chance dimund! Afeared o' a rumswillin' governor! 'Postles' bones! An' ye a soldier an' a gentleman! Strike me dead! Where be yer Griffon speerit? Did Caleb Stave lash it out o' ye through yer skin? Caleb Stave, the son o' the Wantage cobbler. Blood an' wounds!"

"Rave on, old man," replied Griffon, steadily but with a significant undertone of hardness in his voice. "I owe you my life, and more than my life. As to my spirit, it is here, unbroken, unhurt—the spirit of my fathers, Master Penny."

"D'y'e say so? An' what of it? I sp'iled me enemy, an' yer enemy—the traitor an' disp'ler who'd ha' sent ye to the gallows for his own crime but for me'n Henry findin' 'e in the jungle—an' what I take I keep! D'y'e cross me in me own cave, Peter Griffon—me who's been robbed an' betrayed an' hunted? Aye, an' what o' yerself—hidlin' like a fox in his earth, with wounds in yer flesh an' scars on yer back! Yet ye cross me with talk o' right—rights o' property—all for a few colored stones! Where he yer own rights? Where was they when ye was soldierin' for yer king in Flanders an' they murdered yer father? What did kings an' governors an' rights o' property do for 'e then? An' d'y'e reckon the governor came honest an' clean-handed by them dimunds an' pearls? Bah! If ye do ye're a fool!"

"I know nothing of the governor nor of how he came by the jewels of which you and Caleb Stave have robbed him. If the jewels are not his, that is his affair; but they are not yours or mine; and that is my affair. The governor may be a thief, but I am not."

"Here be pride! Sacred finger bones! The pride o' a dentured slave!"

"The self-respect of a gentleman."

"The pride o' a full belly! Let it pass! What would ye have me do with the governor's blunt?"

"Return it to the governor."

"I'll see it in hell first, an' yerself along with it, Griffon or no Griffon! Hold to that course an' I'll sail away with the treasure an' me gran'daughter an' leave ye here to preach yer damn sermons to the crabs, so help me!"

"Old man, Penny or no Penny, there are two endings to that tale! I have admitted my obligations to you; but now I swear to you, by the blood of my father, that if you carry off those jewels it will be across my dead body. Make what you can of that! You'll find me hard to kill."

"You'll never take me away without him, not if you were fifty times my gran'father!" cried the girl.

"Me, too," said Big Tom. "Peter am my friend, If he fight, dis boy fight, too, master."

Sailor Penny screamed oaths at that. He waved his clenched hands above his head. He threatened the girl with a spanking, Big Tom with a hundred lashes, Griffon with everlasting damnation for a fool. Suddenly, speechless for want of breath, he burst into tears of rage and disappointment. They looked at him in silence, embarrassed by their pity and shame for him. He was certainly not a heroic figure, that mahogany-faced mariner in a tantrum of futile and lachrymose hysterics.

## IX.

Four days later, while there was still a hint of the past night's coolness in the morning air, three persons arrived from the jungled mountains at the gate of the governor's house on Fort Royal Hill. They were Peter Griffon and Big Tom and Sailor Penny's man Henry.

Peter wore decent clothes, including a skirted coat and a three-cocked hat, and a hanger with brass hilt and shark-skin grip in a scabbard of black leather. But for the features and expression of his thin face, the cool superiority of his level glance—which was the thing that had driven Caleb Stave to black rage many a time—and the carriage of his back and shoulders, he might have passed for the master of some trafficking bark or brig. Big Tom's costume was neither noteworthy nor elaborate—just breeches cut and stitched up from an old sail and a floppy hat of his own weaving. The clever Henry was in his favorite disguise of an old mammy sweet seller, wooden tray and all.

They had come with the reluctant consent of Sailor Penny. The old man had worn himself into a fever with futile rage and impotent arguments against the iron of Griffon's purpose. At last he had given in, though with bitter sneers and predictions of disaster. What else could he do? This young fool was a Griffon of Berkshire, and the stubborn girl was a Penny, and now all his ambitions and longings were centered in these two—his dreams and heartaches for the green downs and groves of his youth and for peace and gentility in his old age.

Yes, that tough and battered survivor of scores of questionable ventures, who had been half a gentleman in his youth, longed now to become wholly a gentleman by the might of wealth and the magic of the name of Griffon. Young Griffon's will had beaten him at last; and now more than half his wealth was gone for a surety, and all of it was risked, and fever boiled his blood.

"I have business with the governor," said Griffon to the sentry at the gate.

The sentry was quite obviously not a soldier but a seaman. He was not armed with a musket, nor with a bayonet heeled with a wooden plug to fix into the muzzle of a musket, but with a cutlass in his hand and two pistols in his belt. He gave Griffon a queer, questioning look. He turned his head and whistled, and was joined in a moment by two other fellows of unmistakable salty character.

"'E 'as business wif the governor," he told them.

Then all three regarded Griffon and his companions strangely.

"I am here to see the governor on an important matter," announced Griffon with dignity.

Another seaman joined the group, a bo'sun this with a silver call dangling from his neck on a lanyard. He had heard Griffon's second statement of his business. He treated Griffon and Big Tom and Henry to swift but searching glances. He pulled a forelock to Griffon, whispered a few words in the sentry's ear, then requested Griffon politely to follow him.

He led the way across a narrow court, into the big house, along a narrow hall flagged with gray stone. He rapped on a tall mahogany door, opened it, bowed Griffon across the threshold and entered close at his heels. He closed the door behind them, but kept a hand on the knob.

"A gentleman wif important business wif the governor, sir," he said, and there was a suggestion in both voice and manner of extraordinary significance in the statement and of lively expectation concerning the effect of it on the person addressed.

The room was not large, but it was of an imposing height. Four tall windows in

one wall, partially shuttered, looked out over the town and the harbor. The room was unfurnished save for a large table at which sat a gentleman of red and weathered visage, high-nosed, baldish, with epaulets on the shoulders of his blue coat. The gentleman's coat was open from chin to waist, disclosing linen of the whitest and finest. On the desk lay several rolled charts or maps, many documents both open and folded, a bow-wig, a silver-hilted sword in a scabbard of varnished black leather and a number of books.

The gentleman's glance was on Griffon's face. It had been there, unwavering, since the moment of the opening of the door.

"Ah, with the governor," he said, and laid aside his pen and continued to regard the young man.

Griffon bowed. "Have I the honor to address the governor?" he asked.

"You do not know him, then?" queried the other.

"I have seen him, sir, but never close at hand. He looked shorter than yourself."

"True. I am performing his duties for the time being. I am the commander of the frigate in the harbor. Colonel Harran is indisposed. You have but recently come to port, I take it."

"I am from the hills. My business is private rather than official, I think; but I shall gladly dispose of it here and now, sir, with your permission."

"What is the nature of your business?"

"It concerns stolen property of great value."

The acting governor's eyes widened.

"You are either a very brave man or an impudent fool," he said.

"I lack neither courage nor an easy conscience," replied Griffon. "A fortune in jewels was robbed from the governor, from this very house, by a fellow named Stave, a ship's chandler, who did business in Crab-hole Alley. Stave himself was soon afterward robbed of it, along with his own strong box, by a worthy fellow who had been outlawed and ruined by him many years ago. I have persuaded that worthy fellow to allow me to return the jewels to the governor."

The acting governor was now on his feet,

leaning forward eagerly halfway across the littered table.

"What are these jewels?" he asked.

"Diamonds and pearls and rubies of astounding value."

"And you are come with the intention of returning them to Colonel Harran?"

"As you see, sir. To him or his deputy. To the governor."

Griffon put a hand to his throat, pulled upward on a string and brought a little bag of soft yellow leather into view. He drew the loop of string over his head, stepped forward to the table and laid the bag before the acting governor. The bo'sun advanced with him, close at his elbow, and halted with him. The acting governor untied the mouth of the bag and shook onto the table a handful of unset diamonds and rubies and a necklace of great pearls. He stared at them. The fellow at Griffon's elbow trembled.

"And those are not all," said Griffon, producing two more little bags from a pocket of his coat, and emptying them on the table. "There is gold also, which is outside with my fellows."

"Who are you?" cried the acting governor.

"I am Peter Griffon, only son of the late Edward Griffon of Danes's Ride and High Hall and Griffonstun in Berkshire, knight and one time master of the horse."

"Griffon of Berkshire! How come you here—and with these?"

"It is a long story, sir."

During the telling, the acting governor expressed sympathy and astonishment with frequent oaths; and at the conclusion he

grasped the younger man's hand in both of his. He called for wine and for another chair. He wrote a proclamation which set Peter Griffon, esquire, and Richard Penny, yeoman and mariner, free of all fear of the law, and brief documents which made "free blacks" of Big Tom and Henry.

"I will give you letters to his royal highness, which I advise you to deliver in person immediately upon reaching England," he said. "The reward, I promise you, will be princely. Both his majesty and his royal highness are the souls of generosity and justice."

"The reward?" queried Griffon.

"These are royal jewels," replied the other. "They were stolen from Windsor fully eighteen months ago and carried out of the Thames in a bark bound for Lisbon."

"How came they here?"

"A king's ship chased her to the westward, where she fell in with another of her own kidney and was soundly drubbed and stripped to the keel. These pirates sometimes prey upon one another, fortunately."

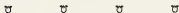
"But how came they into the governor's hands?"

"The late governor of this island—I hanged him at my own yardarm, so there can be no doubt of his demise—was, I regret to say, a blasted pirate."

"A pirate! The governor!"

"It is too true. The late sovereign made a number of mistakes to the detriment of England's fair fame, both public and private; but his majesty is the soul of integrity and justice. The wine is at your elbow, Master Griffon."

#### THE END



## OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER

next week will be an especially attractive issue, with "The Bobcat Pauses," the second of the Hopalong Cassidy series; "That Keeps a Man from Harm," a remarkable Novelette by Charles Wesley Sanders; "A Question of Ethics," a unique study in a boy's idea of the Christmas spirit; "The Wise Man of Borneo," another capital skit by John D. Swain; "The Old Woof's Tale," a corking tidbit from the advertising world told by Robert M. Newcomb, and many good things besides.



# Bright Lights

By **ROBERT ORR CHIPPERFIELD**

*Author of "Above Suspicion," etc.*

## WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART

**FANNIE GILLESPIE**, a slim, blue eyed, brown haired girl, comes to the great city and eventually turns her pretty face toward the bright lights, as the sunflower to the sun, if not as the moth to the flame. Her position is that of saleslady in an exclusive shop for women's hats, really an achievement for a country lass, but in this environment she is envious of the rich clients who have diamonds and saddles and motor cars. Fannie, in her pathetic rivalry, wears imitation gems and tries to approximate the extreme styles in her cheap clothing. A guest in the boarding house, Henry Jordan, a fling cabinet salesman, is devoted to her, but she becomes indifferent to him when she learns that he does not care for frivolous things and that his hope is to save money to marry her. Fannie cannot endure the thought of domesticity; this is her play time of Youth. Jordan discloses in a conversation with another boarder that he is in sympathy with any man who slays the woman who has destroyed his high ideals. Meanwhile, Fannie Gillespie keeps late hours at dances and her escorts are of a swift type—a racing car driver, a beach amusement concessionaire, *et cetera*. She reveals, moreover, that she is in secret fear of some pursuer, and this hint causes the police to suspect murder, and not suicide, when the laughter loving girl is found dead in her room.

### CHAPTER V.

#### "WHY SOME MEN KILL."

**M**ID-MORNING brought comparative quietude to the shocked household, for with the removal of Fannie Gillespie's body the crowd outside had gradually disintegrated and only a few

loiterers remained to hover at a respectful distance from the two officers who still guarded the door.

Within, the lower floor was for the time being deserted, although the echo of a futile debate between Agnes and Caroline came up from the kitchen. There had been no need for the detective to enjoin silence

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upon Mrs. Horton, the landlady; after their interview she had gone directly to her room utterly overwhelmed by the added horror of his implied suggestion. In Henry Jordan's large, pleasant bedchamber beside hers, the young man himself, Simeon Darley, and the new hoarder, Edgar North, talked together in low, subdued tones. Mrs. Moffat was pacing the floor of her own room at the front, and above Myrtle Harris tossed in the troubled sleep superinduced by Dr. Vaughn's opiate.

The door of the hall closet on the top floor stood wide, a pale square of light streaming down into it from the opened trapdoor, and on the roof the detective, Stevenson, was down upon hands and knees in the soot and grime, minutely studying the blurred outline which showed here and there in the thick covering of dust and cinders.

Parallel lines of slender, none too clean rope stretched from pole to pole across the rooftop, except in one space where newly cut ends hung in loops from opposite up-rights, and clothespins were scattered here and there.

A package hastily wrapped in a newspaper lay beside Stevenson, and he sat back on his heels, taking from it a large and exceedingly battered shoe with frayed, dangling strings. This he proceeded to fit over the prints he had been examining in the dust, and then, shaking his head, he rewrapped the dilapidated footgear and, rising, approached one of the posts from which depended a length of the severed clothesline. Detaching it, he coiled it tightly and placed it in the package with the shoe, then crossed to the trapdoor and descended, closing it carefully after him.

In the big back bedroom on the second floor Simeon Darley, fully clothed now, even to the tie of gorgeous hue which flowed beneath the lowest fold of his chin, sat dejectedly on the side of the bed, his hands nervously twisting the coverlet and his dull eyes staring at the floor as though to fix forever in his mind the faded, commonplace pattern of the rug. Henry Jordan moved restlessly about, rumpling his curly, reddish brown hair now and then with an impatient gesture, his haggard face boyish no

longer, hut stamped with lines of maturity and suffering, while from his position by the window Edgar North glanced in a sympathetic but diffident manner from one to the other of them.

A little silence had fallen, but as he halted Henry Jordan broke it.

"I'm going to find out!" He struck one hand into the cupped palm of the other. "I'm going to find out what made her do it, and who it was brought on her whatever trouble she was in! It wasn't any fault of hers— You didn't know her, North, hut Simmy can tell you that it would be as far from her to do anything dishonest she'd be afraid to have found out as it would be to lose her head over some hopeless, romantic affair. She just lived for excitement, and the bright lights fascinated her, blinded her to everything else. She's got a brother somewhere, hut nobody else, and as a friend I mean to get at the truth and make somebody pay!"

"I was a friend of hers, too," Simeon reminded him, shaking his head dolefully. "I was willing to be more than that when I saw that you—well, that you and she weren't going to hit it off after all—hut she would never have married an old fellow like me, and I stopped making more of a fool of myself than I was born to be. There's nothing I wouldn't have done for her, though, and nothing I won't do now; hut I can't see why she did such a thing!"

"Of course she didn't do anything dishonest, Henry, and as for being in love—I don't believe it could ever hit her hard enough to make her feel that life wasn't worth living. As you say, the bright lights were all that counted.

"You met her at dinner last night, Mr. North—God, it doesn't seem possible what's happened since!—and you saw how gay and high spirited she was. Would you have thought she had it in her mind to kill herself before morning?"

North shook his head gravely.

"No, suh, assuredly not. As Mr. Jordan says, I didn't know her, hut the young lady appeared to be most happy and full of life. She must, of co'se, have been in some sorrow or misery, hut she certainly kept it to herself right bravely."

"Well, it isn't any good for us to keep milling it over and over." Simeon rose wearily, the jauntiness of yesterday lost in a profound depression that made his dashing attire seem all the more incongruous, although his figure seemed pathetic now rather than droll. "I just want you to know, Henry, that I'm with you in whatever you're going to do to find out if any one drove that poor child to her death. We owe it to her, and as you say, she has nobody else. I'll go crazy if I don't stop thinking about it, and I've got to get down to the office somehow later. I'm going to see if that detective fellow has gone."

When the door closed behind him, Edgar North stepped forward.

"I'm a stranger to you-all, but I would like to help, too, if there is anything I can do," he offered. "The young lady was your friend, and I only met her once, but down where I come from a woman—especially alone and making her own way—is a kind of charge for every man to be of service to. There is nothing anybody can do for Miss Gillespie now except to reckon with whoever caused her to suffer, just as men-folks kin to her would do, and I hope you-all will count me in, like any neighbor."

"That's good of you, North!" Henry exclaimed as he met the other's resolute glance. "Of course, if her brother comes forward to look after the situation, it won't be up to any of us, and I have an idea he's the sort of fellow who would rather let the whole thing drop and be forgotten than lift a finger to stir up gossip in his home town. Still, I'll never rest until I know just what happened last night."

Stevenson had not descended from the top floor, but, leaving his package beside the closet door, he pushed open the one which swung on yawning hinges. The little room was flooded with light now, for the shade had been pulled up at the single window and a veering streak of sunshine played over the clean, neatly mended rug to the foot of the tall, narrow, tumbled bed.

Its two snowy pillows were piled one on top of the other and still hollowed in the center where a restless head had lain upon them, and the coverlet and bedding were flung back, trailing over the square, shining

brass footboard. A faded pink cotton kimono lay over a chair from beneath which a pair of rose colored boudoir slippers peeped, with one rosette gone; a box of chocolates was upset on the floor, and a small, crumpled handkerchief had been dropped near by, but there was no other sign of disorder in the room, save the second chair, overturned.

A white celluloid toilet set, flanked by bottles of perfume and jars and boxes of cosmetics, was spread on the bureau top, and a row of high heeled shoes and slippers, for the most part gay hued and paper soled, were ranged along a low shelf. From the bracket of the single gas burner above it lengths of ribbon dangled. The room contained in addition only a washstand and a small trunk placed just under the window, but the half open door of the closet revealed close packed gowns of butterfly coloring varied by sober black.

The detective's keen, darting glance took in every detail, although he had already given the room a cursory examination, and now he stepped once more to the window and drew aside the curtain of dotted swiss. The fire escape reached up to the floor below, and a sheer four stories down the cleanly swept square of the cement yard showed like a white patch crossed with the straight, threadlike shadows of the clotheslines stretching from fence to fence. The yards on either side were littered and unkempt, but that directly in the rear sported a grass plot with a few struggling bushes putting forth bedraggled buds, and from each window sill, with its box of sturdy geraniums, trailing vines descended.

That must be a private residence, Stevenson concluded, one of the few remaining in that section only a stone's throw from Broadway which had formerly housed some of the city's most conservative families. Could any one within it have looked from their rear windows on the previous night and seen something which might give him a clue to this problem which to his vision seemed growing more and more complex?

He turned away at last and approached the bureau, opening one drawer after another, to discover in the topmost a confusion of gloves, handkerchiefs, more ribbons,

and a dozen dainty accessories to feminine attire, while below cheap, lacy underwear and sleazy silk stockings were all that met his gaze. Nowhere did there appear to be a scrap of paper bearing even an address, much less the picture post cards and notes which girls of Fannie Gillespie's type usually treasured.

Their absence was in itself significant, and he tried the bathtubs on the shelf in the closet. One contained scraps of lace and ribbon, and another unmended stockings and lingerie, but the rest held only the collection of millinery for which they had been originally intended. The drawer of the washstand yielded a bottle of ink, pens and a box of lavender tinted note paper, but not a line had been written upon it, and he turned his attention to the trunk.

It was locked, but in a leather vanity case which hung beside the mirror the detective found the key. The top tray was evidently a repository for still more finery, but past its usefulness, and Stevenson lifted it out, placing it across the bed. The bottom of the trunk was littered with the very souvenirs which he had been seeking—snapshots and group photographs of the sort procurable at the various resorts and amusement parks, ribbons from candy boxes and bunches of violets, menus and paper favors from many restaurants along the Rialto, and a collection of horns, rattlers and other noise producing toys which attested to the girl's presence at frequent carnivals and holiday festivities.

In all of the photographs Fannie Gillespie herself was prominently featured, sometimes with a taller, dark, laughing girl in company with several youths, but more frequently alone with just one young man, and not the same young man except in three instances. The detective rapidly sorted them out. In three of the pictures her fellow boarder, Henry Jordan, was posed with her; in half a dozen her companion was a man slightly older, loose limbed and yet with the unconscious poise of an athlete. His nose was aquiline, his lips firm and jaw prominent, and a long lock of dark hair strayed carelessly down over his forehead.

The individual who appeared more numerous than either of the other two with

Fannie Gillespie in her gallery was in striking contrast to them. Slender, blond, and almost effeminately dapper, his clothes were obviously custom made, and he wore them with the studied effect of one habituated to self-exploitation. The smug countenance with its small, close clipped mustache and cleft chin was familiar to Stevenson, and he placed him at once as Jack Rogers, a motion picture actor, whom he had seen more than once on the screen.

To the various young men in the other photographs he gave only a passing glance, yet tied them all up together with a bit of violet ribbon and, placing them at one side, continued his search.

He had not, so far, found a scrap of writing, but in a corner of the trunk he came at last upon a five pound candy box filled to the brim with letters. Taking it out, he dropped the trunk lid and seated himself upon it. The letters were for the most part mere scraps of notes making or breaking engagements and signed only with first names. They were undated, but the postmarks supplied that deficiency and showed that they were the collection of nearly a year back.

Several in purple ink on violet note paper bore the name "Eileen," a dozen or more in a large masculine hand with underlines and broad flourishes were signed "Jack," and condescendingly affectionate in tone, addressing the recipient as "Girlykins," or "Little Girl," but they were nearly all half jocular excuses for forgotten or ignored engagements. Eight or ten notes, however, in a plain heavy writing with deep down strokes were in quite a different tenor. Beginning invariably "Dear Fan," they reproached her for missed appointments, coldness and unkindness, binting at flirtations and fickleness on her part and pleading humbly for her favor.

Later ones, as indicated by the postmarks, were more hurt and resentful in tone—as if the writer's patient devotion were tried beyond endurance—and the final one, mailed some six months before, was an impassioned if ungrammatical farewell. They were signed "Frank."

There were "Joes," and "Dicks," a "Bert," a "Fred," and numerous other

masculine names attached to various episodes, but they appeared to be from mere admiring acquaintances and of little moment, and the box was almost empty. None of them had been postmarked "Bison," nor could they by any stretch of the imagination have been written by a brother, and none contained the least reference which would give a clue to the previous night's tragedy.

At the very bottom of the box, however, were several notes of a few lines each, without envelopes and folded into small triangles. They were written in pencil and half of them were unsigned, but at sight of the name attached to the rest the detective frowned thoughtfully and gave himself with complete absorption to their perusal.

The noon whistles blew, and a renewed stir and bustle throughout the house indicated that the normal routine was being resumed in spite of the tragedy. Mrs. Horton, her eyes still red and a look of shrinking terror stamped upon her face, ordered the day's supplies over the telephone instead of venturing to market; Agnes was straightening such of the rooms as she could gain admittance to; and Mrs. Moffat was assisting Myrtle Harris to dress in the event that the detective would release her to go to her work at the motion picture house.

In the drawing-room with the embargo on tobacco lifted for once, Simeon Darley and the young Southerner had foregathered again, but Henry Jordan still kept to his room, pacing back and forth as though inaction were a torture. The presence of his two fellow boarders had been a trial, but he found their absence insupportable, and turned with relief when a knock sounded upon his door.

It was the detective, Stevenson.

"You wanted to see me?" There was a note of surprise in his voice, but he added quickly: "Oh, yes! I was the first to enter the room behind the policeman after he broke down the door. We didn't touch the body. It wasn't necessary; anybody could have seen even in the darkness that it was too late. Come in, won't you?"

Stevenson entered, closing the door, but he did not appear to see the chair which

the young man indicated. Instead, he advanced to the center table, standing with his back to the light so that his face was in shadow.

"You knew Fannie Gillespie pretty well, didn't you?" There was in his manner now none of the confidential, sympathetic note he had used in his interview with the landlady. "Ever meet her before she came here to board?"

Henry shook his head.

"No."

"How long was it after you first met her that you and she became engaged?"

"We never were," Henry started slightly and his face flushed. "I admired Miss Gillespie a lot—"

"It won't do!" the detective interrupted shortly. "You were in love with the girl."

"Yes, I was—or at least I thought so. It amounts to the same thing, I suppose." Henry straightened, throwing back his shoulders, and eyed the other steadily. "Miss Gillespie didn't care for me, however, and there was an end to it. I don't see how that matters now, or what it's got to do with your investigation."

"Don't you?" Stevenson came a step forward and rested his knuckles on the table. "There was an understanding between you two, wasn't there?"

"Not a definite one."

"Definite enough for you to take it pretty hard when she threw you over!" A slow smile grew on the detective's face. "Why did she, Jordan? What was the row about?"

"Miss Gillespie didn't 'throw me over,' as you call it!" Henry retorted hotly. "I've told you that I admired her and thought for a time that I was in love with her; perhaps I was, but I don't see what business it is of the authorities. Miss Gillespie did not care enough about me to marry me, and told me so, but there wasn't any 'row.'"

"How long was it after she came here that you began going around with her?"

"Oh, several months. She was so popular and had so many friends that I never thought there would be a chance for me, and I was taken up with my work. It was

late in the summer after she came back from her vacation that I asked her to go to a band concert with me in the park, and from then on—"

He paused, and Stevenson finished for him.

"From then on you were sweethearts. Even if she didn't care enough about you to marry you, she let you think she did. It was all fixed in your mind at least, was it not?"

"I had misunderstood Miss Gillespie's attitude toward me," responded Henry stiffly. "It was not her fault, and the matter was ended some time ago. I don't wish to discuss it."

"'Fraid you'll have to, young man!" There was a sterner note in the detective's tone. "You and the girl exchanged notes that didn't go through the mail. What did you do—slip them under her door?"

"No," Henry was plainly taken aback. "We put them in the big vase that stands in the wall niche at the turn of the stairs just outside here, on this floor. It all began only in fun, and we didn't do it regularly—"

He stopped, for Stevenson had taken a handful of the little triangular folded notes from his pocket and was slowly opening them. He showed one of the unsigned ones.

"Is this your writing?"

Henry nodded.

"Yes. You'll find my name on some of them, if Miss Gillespie kept them all. What of it? Surely you don't imagine that what was to her merely a—a flirtation—has anything to do with what happened last night!"

"Do you recall the occasion when you wrote this?" Stevenson had been running through the notes, ignoring his protest, and now he read aloud: "'Dear Fannie: I've been thinking over what you said, and I don't see my way clear to taking you to that masquerade. Dear, I'm sorry, but you know my circumstances and what I'm working for. Since Christmas we've spent all that I saved in the six months before, and I must call a halt some time. Be my own girl and come with me to the skating rink instead; we'll drop in afterward for a dance and some ice cream anywhere you

say. Don't be angry, sweetheart; we can't go on this way. Henry.'"

"I remember that, all right. It was just before St. Valentine's Day, and Miss Gillespie wanted to go to a masquerade where the tickets alone would have been more than I could afford," Henry responded a trifle grimly.

"She went, though?" the detective suggested.

"With some one else. That was the beginning of the break between us, but we stayed good friends. I couldn't give her what she had to have and we both realized it."

"Good friends, eh? How about this? 'You can't mean it! I won't give you up! I had rather see you dead before me than belonging to somebody else, and you can't play with me as you have with the others! You have driven me half crazy, Fannie, I love you so!'"

"For God's sake, what's the good of going over all that?" Henry groaned. "Haven't I told you that I was wild about her and I made a fool of myself? Don't you think it's bad enough for me to remember now without bearing my own words! I'm not the only fellow that's been hard hit in his life, but it's all over and done with now!"

"All over, last night!" Stevenson assented coolly. "You'd rather have seen her dead and you've had your wish!"

"What do you mean?" Henry demanded hoarsely.

"What did you mean when you wrote this?" the detective countered. "'I understand you at last! I wouldn't let myself believe it before. I can see now why some men kill and think the price well paid to rid the world of some one better out of it! You never cared, you don't know what it is, and when I look back and think what a fool I was and all that I hoped and planned with you just laughing at me I feel like killing somebody myself! I warn you, you have driven me mad!' That's pretty plain, Jordan, but I guess we'd like to know about it a little more definitely. You admit you wrote this, the handwriting is yours, you were in love with the girl and she turned you down. You threatened her—"

"Stop right there!" Henry exclaimed in a low voice. "Are you accusing me of—murder? Her—her body was found with the door locked on the inside! I was wild with jealousy and disappointment when I wrote that, but it meant nothing! You don't think that I could have had anything to do with her death? It's monstrous!"

"The door was locked from the inside, but the window was open and there are marks on the sill." Stevenson returned significantly. "The rope that hung her was strong enough to bear the weight of a man also if it was let down from the roof where it was cut from a clothesline. I guess you'd better come down town with me, Jordan, and explain about those letters to the chief!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### LOCKWOOD STERETT'S OPINION.

"I'll never believe it, never!" Mrs. Horton plumped down in the rocker in Mrs. Moffat's room, her lips compressed in a straight line and her mild eyes blazing. "When that smart Aleck of a detective first talked to me yesterday he hinted that—that it wasn't poor Fannie's own hands fastened that rope around her neck, but I was so overcome I didn't guess what he was getting at. I'd like to've died when he took Henry away, and why that boy won't clear himself—"

"What did he say to you this morning when you went down to see him?" Mrs. Moffat asked.

"He wouldn't even see me." The landlady shook her head mournfully. "I gave a piece of my mind to that detective, though, when he came again! It's terrible enough to have that poor, dear child dead, to say nothing of her killing herself, without Henry being accused of murdering her! I don't wonder he's so broke up he don't know what to do, seeing as he used to be crazy about her! I declare I think the police must be downright fools, holding him like this when they know they'll only have to let him go!"

Mrs. Moffat pursed her lips reflectively. "Has he a lawyer?"

"Yes. The firm he works for sent him a big one—Lockwood Sterett, of Sterett, Hecksher and Mullanafey. They defended that girl last year who was accused of shooting her brother-in-law right in the lobby of the Odeon Theater and the jury acquitted her without leaving their seats. I understand Henry was hardly willing to see him. I can't make out what's got into that boy!"

"I remember reading about that case. It looks pretty serious, doesn't it, if it's going to take a lawyer as celebrated as that to get young Mr. Jordan out of this trouble?" Mrs. Moffat observed. "The police may be making out a stronger case against him than we have any idea of."

"Oh, it's only that the firm want him to have the best," Mrs. Horton replied easily. "They think a lot of Henry, you know. He went right into the factory and learned all about the steel construction of that furniture from the ground up; that's why he can sell it so well, and I shouldn't wonder if he made his everlasting fortune with that lock he's inventing! I must say it's a dreadful thing to bring such a charge as this against a fine young man like Henry, but he ain't the weak kind to let it hurt his whole future and he'll never in the world be held for trial. They couldn't!"

"He must have been in his room all night before last," Mrs. Moffat spoke as if to herself. "Did he go out earlier in the evening? It's funny I didn't hear him come in when his room is just back of this and I'm a light sleeper."

"I heard him," the landlady affirmed. "I wouldn't give that Stevenson the satisfaction of telling him, but it was nearly midnight and he walked the floor for the longest time afterward; I had half a mind to get up and ask him if he was sick or anything, for he ain't usually restless like that. There's the bell. Do you suppose it's that dratted detective again?"

She arose, patting her gray hair nervously and smoothing her voluminous black skirt, and after a brief interval Agnes's slipshod feet could be heard scuttling up the stairs.

"Mis' Horton!" Her watery eyes were staring and her breath caught in her throat,

"Who d'you think's down in the parlor? A man who calls himself 'Gillespie'—Mr. William Gillespie!"

"Lord A'mighty!" Mrs. Horton gasped. "Poor Fannie's brother! Whatever in the world am I to say to him?"

She hustled out and down the stairs to find a young man standing by the window in the parlor. He turned as she entered and came slowly forward, a tall, awkward young man in an ill fitting suit of gray with a wide new mourning hand sewed crookedly on one sleeve, and a made-up black tie about a collar a size too big, through the wings of which his Adam's apple moved up and down convulsively.

His prominent eyes were a paler blue than Fannie's, his features sharper and the hair slicked down flatly over his low forehead was a dull mouse color, nevertheless, there was a slight, indefinable resemblance which made the landlady's eyes blur and she impulsively held out both hands.

"Mr. Gillespie, I was just saying that I don't know what I'm going to say to you nor how I can let you know what I feel! You're a relation of Fannie?"

"I'm her brother." His nasal voice was flat and unemotional and he shook one of her hands listlessly. "Feller from New York police came up to Bison last night and told me what had happened to her, and my wife thought I'd better get down here myself and see what was to be done. I ain't heard from Fannie in a long time. She didn't leave any word for me, did she?"

Mrs. Horton shook her head.

"No, but she—she often talked about you to me, Mr. Gillespie." In her desire to comfort him she good heartedly stretched a point, yet she felt vaguely with a repelled sense of frustration that this long faced, solemn young man was not in any pressing need of it. "You're the only relation she had in the world, ain't you?"

"Yes, but we weren't much alike. I'm steady going, but she was all for gay doings. I don't know's I ever expected to hear from her again and this—this is an awful shock! My wife's on the School Board and quite a worker in our church and it's going to make it pretty hard for her if there's a lot

of scandal. We were set against Fannie coming to the city from the first and did everything we could to stop her, but she was possessed to get here ever since she was a little thing, and this is what's come of it!

"I've got a first class shoe store, and she could have clerked it for me or kept the books, but it didn't satisfy her; she had to have New York life. Well, she got it! I shouldn't wonder if I had to shut up store for a while and take my wife away, and it's right in my hazy season!"

Mrs. Horton's face flushed and her eyes snapped.

"I guess poor Fannie's suffered more'n anybody else will!" she remarked. "What did the man that went up to find you tell you about her?"

"That she'd hung herself!" A dull flush had mounted, too, in his sharp face and his jaw set. "I don't know any more and I don't want to. She had a good home to come back to if she was so minded and we'd always have looked out for her no matter what kind of a muss she got herself into. There wasn't any call for her to do what she did, though my wife always said nothing but harm would come of her leaving us like that."

"Fannie was as good and sweet a girl as ever I had in my house!" Mrs. Horton declared indignantly. "There wasn't any harm come to her till—till the night before last, and Heaven only knows what that was! They told you she—she'd killed herself, but they ain't so sure. They didn't tell you that they've arrested one of my hoarders on suspicion of knowing something about her death?"

William Gillespie shook his head, his slow mind evidently taking in with difficulty the portent of her words. Then his flush receded and his jaw sagged.

"Murder!" he mumbled thickly. "You mean they think somebody murdered her? This hoarder of yours—what makes them—"

"Because he wanted to marry her, but I guess she must have thrown him over. Not that there's a single thing against him; the police are only trying to make it out worse than it is, though goodness knows it's terrible enough, Mr. Gillespie! Henry Jor-

dan is a splendid young man, and he'd never have harmed a hair of your sister's head, no matter what they say!"

Gillespie seemed scarcely to have heard. His bony, large knuckled hands were opening and closing with a tenseness which made them tremble and a cold, glittering light had dawned in his pale eyes.

"If it was that!" Cords stood out in his throat and his Adam's apple bobbed more convulsively than ever. "If Fan didn't do it after all—if somebody killed her—I'm glad I come!"

"Nobody knows whether they did or not, but it wasn't Henry Jordan!" Mrs. Horton reiterated hastily. "Don't you believe that for a minute, Mr. Gillespie! Fannie hadn't any reason in the world that any of us can think of to kill herself, but it seems more impossible still that anybody else could have done it, even if they had cause, which they hadn't. Folks can't be got up out of their beds with the gas on bright and—and hung, without struggling or making some kind of an outcry that could have been heard, for though Fannie was the only one sleeping on that floor the rooms just below was all occupied, and she'd locked her door from the inside."

"The police ought to know what they're doing." Gillespie's thin lips tightened. "I guess I'll get on down to their headquarters and see what they can tell me. I suppose it 'll cost a sight of money to prove anything, but the State 'll likely pay it, and 'as long as there's bound to be scandal it might as well be proved that Fan didn't fly in the face of Providence and kill herself. We'll be able to hold up our heads, anyway!"

"I s'pose"—Mrs. Horton's own lips curled—"I s'pose if somebody—not Henry—did murder Fannie you'd just as lief see 'em punished for it even if it did make a little more talk?"

"I calculate the law 'll take its course, ma'am." He turned toward the door, but paused on the threshold. "We're peace'ble, law-abiding folks up my way and I don't aim to go against the police; if they say it was murder they'll take care of who did it, and if it turns out that Fannie killed herself we'll just bury her right and try to

live it down. It won't bring Fan back to get in more scandal than we be in a'ready.

"I'm stopping at the Witlow Hotel if you should want to reach me, but I'll be much obliged if you won't let on to any of the fellers that write pieces for the papers; my wife wouldn't want me to say anything. I'll make all the arrangements for the funeral as soon as the police 'll give me leave."

"And your sister's things?" Mrs. Horton asked in a repressed tone. "The police are holding 'em now, but do you want I should send 'em to you?"

"Yes! 'Maple Street, Bison,' is the address; I guess likely my wife can find some use for them," he returned promptly, then hesitated. "You don't know if there was any wages coming to her where she worked, do you?"

"No, I don't!" the disgusted landlady snapped. "I guess maybe you can find out if you try, though."

"I calculate I can." Gillespie nodded, unmoved. "Did she owe for board or anything else that you know of, Mrs. Horton? I don't aim for her to have any debts left behind her, though she was always awful extravagant."

"Fannie didn't owe me anything and I ain't heard of her getting in debt," she replied with a final effort at self-restraint. "I guess the funeral will be about the only expense you'll be put to, Mr. Gillespie, and if you feel that it's too much for you I'll be glad to pay it myself, as I told the police. Seems to me it's little enough to do for her!"

"I'm obliged to you, ma'am, but it won't cost much." He was impervious to the shaft. "Good day to you."

Mrs. Horton did not trust herself to reply to the salutation except by the merest of nods, and when the front door had closed behind him she started for the stairs, but encountered Simeon Darley in the hall.

"Did you hear him?" she demanded. "That was Fannie's own brother and all he cared about was to know if there was any money due her at the store! Do you wonder she got away from home quick's ever she saved up carfare?"

Simeon nodded gravely.



"I thought he'd be like that if he showed up at all. Little Fannie wouldn't have dropped her relations if they hadn't been pretty mean to her. I can't get over the shock about Henry, though! Why, just a little before they took him away he told me and that new young fellow, North, that he wouldn't rest until he found out why she'd killed herself! That doesn't look as if he could have had a suspicion it wasn't suicide, let alone that he—he knew anything, unless he's a lot deeper than we ever thought."

"Why, how you talk, Mr. Darley!" Mrs. Horton exclaimed in amazed reproach. "Surely you don't believe—"

"I don't know what to think!" He shook his head. "I'd never have believed it of Henry myself, but the police don't usually risk making mistakes and there's no telling what they know."

"He's the quiet kind you can't always make out and he did seem to take Fannie's turn-down mighty cool considering how crazy he was about her; it seemed kind of funny to me, now that I remember. It don't seem possible, knowing the boy as we do, that he could have been planning such a fearful thing, but how are we to judge what was going on in his mind?"

"Well, I can, still having what gumption I was born with!" Mrs. Horton declared loyally. "As to the police not making mistakes— There goes the door bell again. If it's that Gillespie man back I don't know's I'll be responsible for what I may say to him!"

But it was not William Gillespie. The gentleman who entered when Agnes opened the door was middle-aged and urbane, with large lensed glasses astride his aristocratic nose, straight, smooth shaven lips and a clean cut fighting jaw. The tones in which he announced his name and errand were low, but they carried to the ears of Mrs. Horton and her boarder, who had discreetly retreated under the slope of the stairs, and the landlady waddled quickly forward.

"Mr. Sterett? I'm Mis' Horton, and I must say I'm glad to see you! Come right in the parlor; I heard Henry Jordan's firm had got you to look out for him in this trouble, and if there's anything I can tell you I'll be very pleased."

"Thank you." The attorney bowed, and placing his hat on the table, took the seat to which she motioned after closing the door and dropping into her own chair. "I find that my client is too disturbed in mind at present to confer with me at any length, and there are some details you can readily give me."

"Go right ahead and ask me what you like!" Mrs. Horton folded her hands. "I want to say first off, though, that I know Henry didn't have a thing in the world to do with poor Fannie Gillespie's death! I haven't had a minute's doubt of him, and I ain't going to, no matter what the police try to saddle him with!"

"That is gratifying to hear, Mrs. Horton, but I may say I had no misgivings as to your attitude." Lockwood Sterett smiled genially. "We understand each other perfectly, I think, and you realize you will only be helping Mr. Jordan by giving me your confidence. You have had a great deal of experience with young people?"

"If twenty years boarding them and kind of watching over them means anything, I should say I had!" Mrs. Horton responded with emphasis. "I like to have 'em 'round me, and they know it, and usually they get to coming to me with their troubles. No harm ever come to any of 'em under my roof until the other night!"

"I'm sure of that. My client tells me that at one time he was strongly attached to the unfortunate young girl who is dead; can you tell me how serious, in your estimation, that attachment was?"

He eyed her inquiringly, and Mrs. Horton's glance fell.

"'Bout as serious as it could be, I guess, for Henry's real serious in everything, and I never knew him to bother with any other girl. It come on him slow, for Fannie'd been here several months before he began to pay her attention, but though he got it real bad, he didn't lose his head."

"It's my opinion he realized she wasn't the girl for him at the same time she made up her mind he couldn't give her the kind of good times and expensive parties she wanted, and he was sensible and strong enough not to let it get the best of him. There's no denying he cared, though."

"I see," the attorney said slowly. "There were others, no doubt, who were waiting to give Fannie Gillespie these good times?"

"Plenty. She was pretty as a picture, and full of life and innocent fun; she had a lot of gentlemen friends who could spend more'n Henry. Not that Fannie was what they call a gold-digger, hut she was crazy about the bright lights, and she just never thought what things cost, and with auto racers and motion-picture fellows and men like them it seems to be easy come and easy go—"

"Actors, do you mean—and race drivers?" Sterett interrupted. "Who were they? Did you know them?"

Mrs. Horton gave their names to the attorney, and added:

"I don't think Fannie cared for anybody; at least, she never would have killed herself over any man living! That's what makes it all the more mysterious, for she must have done it herself!"

"Then there was undoubtedly some reason for it, and we'll have to find that reason," the attorney remarked quickly. "That will be the first step in refuting the circumstantial evidence brought against my client, for we cannot establish a corroborated alibi for that night. Mr. Jordan has already informed the authorities that after dining he went out alone and walked for several hours, encountering no one he knew, and that on his return he let himself in with his key and went directly to his room without seeing any other member of the household."

"His room's right next mine, and I heard him come in, if that 'll help any!" Mrs. Horton declared eagerly. "He didn't leave it again, either, at least not until I fell asleep, and that must have been a good hour. It was twelve or a little before when he got home."

"I'm afraid that will have little value." Sterett shook his head. "The autopsy has shown that the young woman came to her death some six or seven hours before the body was found, presumably between one and three in the morning. You say that in your opinion she would never have killed herself because of a love affair; can you

suggest any possible motive for her suicide?"

"No, I can't, and the whole thing's just about driving me crazy!" Mrs. Horton avowed. "There wasn't any reason, but neither was there for anybody to murder her! They can't ever fasten it on Henry, though, that's one comfort! How soon do you suppose they'll let him go, Mr. Sterett?"

"When twelve men on a jury decide that he is not guilty, Mrs. Horton," replied Sterett very gravely. "That they must so decide is a foregone conclusion, but we must not underestimate the strength of the case against him. Henry Jordan, unless further and contradictory evidence comes to light, will inevitably be indicted and brought to trial."

## CHAPTER VII.

### NEW LIGHT.

THE attorney's prediction was verified. At General Sessions Henry Jordan was indicted and held for the grand jury on a charge of murder in the first degree. Much to Mrs. Horton's indignation, hail was denied him, and as he steadfastly refused to see any one hut his attorney, she was forced to send her messages of cheer through that obliging gentleman.

Fannie Gillespie's body had been taken to her former home, and her brother came no more to the boarding house after her pitiful finery and trinkets were packed and shipped. Mrs. Moffat completed her huying and returned to Ohio, Simeon Darley with a wondrous array of sport clothes departed upon his vacation, and the long, hot summer days passed in a brooding suspense.

Edgar North, the bond salesman from New Orleans, had slipped quietly into the life of the household, and proved to be a young man of regular if somewhat solitary habits and unfailing courtesy, but he maintained a reserve which Myrtle Harris's broadest hints for entertainment failed to penetrate, and she gave him up in disgust.

Late in June a new boarder made her appearance—a tall, slim, quiet-voiced girl

with smooth, nut-brown hair, delicate features and deep, serious violet-blue eyes. She was one of several under-secretaries to a prominent banker, and Mrs. Horton was elated at her advent, but installed her with secret misgivings in the large front room on the top floor. No one had climbed that last flight of stairs since the tragedy except Agnes, on dreaded cleaning days, and she never passed that closed door at the rear without feeling the scant hair rise on her head and goose flesh stand out upon her lean, wiry arms. Caroline, the cook, had flatly refused to avail herself further of the roof for clothes drying purposes, vouchsafing an occult reason in addition to its grim memories.

"Debils or ghose's, 'twarn't nothin' human done put dat rope 'roun' po' Miss Fan's neck dat night, ca'se huccome dey, steal mah shoe outen de back yard?" she demanded. "Sot 'em out dere evenin' befo', I did, an' w'en I done look fo' 'em atter de tribulation o' de murder, one o' 'em was gone! Dey done dat to wuk some spell on me, and I ain't gwine nowhere near dat air roof, not agin'!"

Mrs. Horton felt constrained to warn Myrtle Harris not to reveal to the newcomer the details of Fannie Gillespie's death if she had not read them in the papers, but the precaution was needless, for Marion Gray herself broached the subject when they were sitting on the steps of the high stoop one warm evening after dinner.

"It was very sad about the poor girl who died here last month, Mrs. Horton." Her tone was filled with a hesitating sympathy. "It must have been a terrible shock to you all."

"Shock is no name for it!" Mrs. Horton responded, feeling a sense of relief that this latest hoarder knew, after all. Simmy Darley would be home soon from his vacation, and no amount of warning could stop his garrulous tongue. "I thought I should never get over it, Miss Gray, especially with what's before us when court opens again; but I guess you can stand most things if you gotta. I never had a nicer girl in my house than poor Fannie, and the whole dreadful thing is a mystery to me! Mr. North met her—he come just

the night before it happened—and he can tell you she didn't act like the thought of death had ever entered her mind."

"No. Miss Gillespie seemed ve'y happy and lighthearted." Thus appealed to, Edgar North replied in his slow, musical drawl. "She impressed me as being a most charming young lady, hut of co'se I was in no position to judge her feelings. I am not familiar with the ways of no'thern co'te procedure, but I cannot help thinking there may be room fo' doubt of the wisdom shown in the co'se taken."

"You mean about arresting Henry?" Mrs. Horton came to the point bluntly. "There wasn't any wisdom about it; it was the most awful piece of—"

She paused, for Edgar North had risen and stepped aside as a dark, pretty girl hesitated for a moment and then came up the steps in a little rush, with a soft swish of her silk skirt.

"Why, Miss Gaffney—"

"Mrs. Horton, can I see you for a few minutes? I thought perhaps you might not remember me, but—"

"Of course I do! You were poor Fannie's friend, that worked with her at Louisette's!" Mrs. Horton exclaimed as the girl halted. "You used to come here to see her, and I looked for you at the funeral in the undertaking parlors."

"I couldn't go!" Miss Gaffney responded in a low, shuddering tone, darting an uneasy, confused glance at the other two from her bold, heavy-lashed eyes. "I've been wanting to talk to you, though, for ever so long, but I couldn't make up my mind."

"Come right in the parlor!" Mrs. Horton rose and led the way. "I'm awful glad you come! Did that brother of Fannie's show up at the store?"

"Yes. Wasn't he awful? You'd never think he and Fannie— But that isn't what I came to see you about." The girl eyed the open window cautiously as she seated herself on the edge of a chair. "Mrs. Horton, will you promise never to say a word if I tell you something? The police detectives have been coming to the store, and then the lawyer for that fellow who's been accused, and Louisette is wild! She

needn't be, for the publicity didn't hurt her with the trade that buys the most, only the old, conservative crowd who fuss about a forty-dollar uncurled ostrich as if it was a hundred-and-fifty bird of paradise; but she likes their cars in the line in front of the door, and if anybody else comes asking for me on account of me being such friends with Fannie, I'm afraid I'll lose my position. All the same, there's something on my mind that I've got to tell, and I don't know who else to go to! You'll keep it to yourself?"

"Something you know that nobody else does?" Mrs. Horton asked eagerly. "I can't help Fannie now, nor hurt her either, to have anything known; but if it's about Henry Jordan, if it'll make a difference in his trial, what's the good of telling me when it isn't to go any further?"

"Oh, I don't know what to do!" Miss Gaffney twisted the wrist cords of her vanity case with nervous fingers. "It isn't about Mr. Jordan, though it might make a—a big difference. I met him when Fannie was going around with him, and I thought she was silly to waste her time with a tight-wad like that who wasn't any fun, when there were heaps of just dandy boys waiting to show us wonderful times and take us out right."

"She did have sense enough after a while to break with him, but even though he did take it awful bad, and act as if she'd done something terrible, I can't bring myself to think it was him killed her, if anybody did; not after the things she told me! You don't believe there's a—a possible chance that they'll convict him just because of those letters, do you, Mrs. Horton?"

"I didn't believe they could hold him for trial, but they did!" the landlady replied grimly. "If men whose business it is to judge murderers could take such a stand, there's no telling what a fool jury will do! If you know anything that'll help him, even though he wasn't the kind to throw his money away on good times that didn't mean anything to a regular man, and you don't come forward and tell it, it'll be on your conscience the rest of your life, providing you've got one!"

"You needn't be mean to me!" The girl

sniffed. "I've got to think of myself, too, haven't I? I'd never get taken on in a swell place like Louissette's again with more notoriety, and it isn't as if I really knew anything, only what Fannie was afraid of. I'm afraid, too! If Frank Black knew I'd talked about him—"

"That auto racing feller?" Mrs. Horton interrupted. "So Fannie was scared, after all, and it wasn't of what Henry might do! I s'pose you know you'll likely be called at the trial anyway? Louissette can't blame you for that!"

"Not if I—I just don't know anything!" Miss Gaffney faltered.

"But you'll be under oath, and you've got to tell the truth!" The older woman laid a plump hand on the girl's knee. "Mr. Sterett's been after you already, you say? Now, s'pose you was to go to him with me and tell him everything, leaving him to find out the truth without ever letting on the tip come from you? If you ain't thinking about doing right by Henry, don't you feel you kind of owe it to Fannie? Mr. Sterett won't let this Black feller or anybody else make trouble for you, and it'll save you, maybe, from telling lies in court that you could go to jail for yourself if it was proved on you!"

Miss Gaffney cowered in her chair.

"Oh, it's terrible!" she moaned. "If you think Mr. Sterett wouldn't ever give me away—"

Twenty minutes later Mrs. Horton, in her best black-beaded dress and a top-heavy bonnet, towed the reluctant witness determinedly into the attorney's luxurious library, and explained the situation. Lockwood Sterett had been covertly amused at her somewhat incoherent telephone message, but he grew quickly serious when its purport was revealed.

Motioning suavely to chairs, he addressed himself with convincing reassurance to Eileen Gaffney.

"My dear young lady, no one shall ever know we have had this little conference! You were wise in coming to me, for I shall be prepared to shield you from awkward questioning at the trial. You were Fannie Gillespie's closest friend, and she naturally confided in you. Am I to understand that

she was in fear of her life, and from some one other than my client?"

Eileen Gaffney nodded.

"I don't know that she thought Frank Black would actually kill her, but she was afraid of him. She'd treated him the same way she did Mr. Jordan and other fellows besides, only he wasn't the kind to—to take a throw without coming back. He had an awful temper; Fannie told me once that he'd half killed another driver because he thought he'd done something crooked to him in a road race, and he didn't do it openly, either! He waited for another race and then purposely ran him off a bridge! I don't know, of course, only what Fannie told me!"

"I understand," Sterett interposed with a nod. "Go on. When did Fannie Gillespie—er, throw him?"

"Last summer. She knew him a long time before ever she came to Louisette's, where her and me got to be friends, and he was just crazy about her—more than Mr. Jordan, I guess. Anyway, he showed it more. He was a grand spender, and he used to get a friend for me and take us out for elegant parties, with a car of his own and everything!"

Eileen waxed enthusiastic, then her pretty face clouded, and she shrugged. "He got going too strong, though, and wanted Fannie to marry him, and right then he was cold with her. She canned him and took up with Mr. Jordan, and Frank just faded. I warned her he wouldn't take it like that, and I was right, for he was only waiting; he'd sized up Mr. Jordan, and knew just about how long Fannie would stand for free lectures and cheap movies when she'd been used to swell times! Sure enough, she turned Mr. Jordan down in February or March, and as soon as he saw her around in the big places again with Jack Rogers and Ben Newell and the crowd, Frank came back."

"You mean that Fannie Gillespie accepted his attentions again?" the attorney asked.

"She did that, all right!" Eileen giggled. Then her face grew very sober. "Fannie was willing for all the good times he'd give her, but she told him flat she wasn't going

to have any more love nonsense; she was off that! It's funny that a fellow'll never get that through his head if he don't want to believe it; Frank didn't. He was more determined to marry her this time than before, and at last Fannie got to be a little afraid of him."

"She told you so?" Sterett's eyes narrowed behind their wide rimmed glasses. "When did this happen? What did she say?"

"It was about a month before—before she died." Eileen's rather shrill tones had lowered. "She'd been going out with a lot of fellows, and Frank was getting sore about it. One morning at the store she told me she had had an awful fight with him the night before, and he said he'd fix her so nobody else would want to go out with her."

"I asked her what he meant, and she kind of shivered, and said maybe he'd throw vitriol at her, or smash her up in his car or something; that he'd looked like murder! It was then she told me about the other driver he'd crippled, but the next minute she was laughing and said he wouldn't ever dare do anything to her; but I watched, and from then on she was different; she wouldn't talk about it, but she was nervous and unhappy when she was going out with him. I asked her why she went, and she said she had to kid him along 'til he left for Detroit, and then she wouldn't bother with him any more."

"When did Frank Black go to Detroit? It was the night before her body was discovered, wasn't it?"

"No. He was supposed to go then, but he didn't!" Her voice was a mere whisper, now. "Fannie didn't tell me. She didn't know, and besides I didn't see her again after she went home from the store that afternoon. She'd been acting more and more nervous, and a few days before she admitted to me at last that she was afraid of him; it was the first time any fellow had ever made her feel that way, but she knew something dreadful would happen before she got rid of him, and she wished from the bottom of her heart she'd never laid eyes on him."

"You are sure of that?" Mr. Sterett

tapped his desk thoughtfully. "You are positive those were her words?"

"Every one," Eileen declared. "There'd been another quarrel, for she was getting so scared of him she had told him a story about some date or other, just as if he had a right to know where she was going, or who with, and he caught her. He said she ought to have that lie choked back down her throat, and if she didn't promise to lay off of everybody while he was away she'd never go out with anybody again. I was afraid for her, because none of my gentlemen friends would go that far; and I begged her not to see him any more, but she said she had to, for the last time. That last time was the night before she died, and it was somebody else told me what happened. But I'd rather not say who—"

"Never mind that now. What was it?" Sterett leaned forward. "Do you mean about the scene in the Jazzway Restaurant, when Rogers came to the table?"

Eileen flushed and hesitated.

"That wasn't all," she said at last. "Maybe you heard Jack was working in a new picture? Well, they laid him off, and put some one else in his part; he don't get very big ones, yet it was so easy, but I guess maybe if you found out why he didn't go on with it—I couldn't tell you, only somebody said he'd met with a kind of an accident—"

"I see," Sterett nodded. "He went away from the restaurant after the scene, leaving Fannie Gillespie and Black together there, didn't he?"

"I don't know where he went," Eileen disclaimed hastily. "I heard Fannie ran off herself and left Frank sitting there alone, and he seemed to be in a terrible rage. Real late, when he was supposed to be on the train going to Detroit, somebody I know saw him in Gilfay's, that place where all the sporting men go, and when they asked him why he was still in town he said he'd waited over because there was something he had to 'tend to, and he said it in a nasty kind of way.

"I—I was told he did take an early train next morning, but you could find that out, Mr. Sterett; maybe you could find out, too,

where he was during the time between. I don't mean that any of my friends know, or told me, but it seemed to me somebody ought to just make sure. It was him Fannie was afraid of, not Mr. Jordan."

"She told you all about her affair with Henry Jordan?" Sterett changed his line of inquiry abruptly.

"Oh, yes! Fannie told me everything, I guess," Eileen's tone was buoyant with relief, and she chatted on: "I never could understand what she saw in him, but perhaps it was just because he was new, and then he'd passed her up for some months there at Mrs. Horton's, as if he didn't know she was alive, and Fannie wasn't used to that. I shouldn't wonder if she made up her mind for fun to get him going, and then fell for him herself for a while."

"You knew what they eventually quarreled over?" the attorney pursued.

"Because he—" Eileen glanced at Mrs. Horton, and quickly amended her reply. "Because she was lively and liked parties, and he didn't. She was crazy about dancing, not just sitting around holding hands, and she got tired, I guess. I knew about those notes he wrote her—she used to show them to me, and we'd laugh over them. I mean, he was so preachy and fault-finding, as if she was married to him already, when that was the last thing she was thinking of! Still, I couldn't keep quiet and let him face this, when I knew about Frank Black. I'd be scared something terrible to have him know I said it, but if any one broke in her room that night and killed Fannie, it was him!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ARRAIGNED.

MRS. HORTON settled herself firmly in her chair and gazed about the crowded court room with a grimly critical eye. Mrs. Moffat, who had returned for the winter stock of ladies' and misses' attire for Feingold's Emporium, was seated beside her, and a few rows behind Simeon Darley folded his new fawn colored topcoat carefully over his plump knees and solemnly regarded the judge,

The jury had been selected with expedition, and Mrs. Horton nudged her companion.

"I don't think much of that foreman's looks!" she observed. "I never thought that a little man with a chin like that had much mind of his own, and you heard him say he considered circumstantial evidence as good's any other. I can't figger why Mr. Sterett accepted him."

"He's married and got a son," Mrs. Moffat whispered back shrewdly. "In human nature he'll put his boy in Henry Jordan's place; it would be different if he had daughters. Hush!"

The district attorney had risen to address the jury, and at his first crisply enunciated words Mrs. Moffat glanced at the prisoner. Henry Jordan was thinner and pallid, but it was not that which had drawn her attention repeatedly since his entrance; it was the look of stern maturity which these weeks of suspense had graven on his features, robbing them of their last attribute of youth.

She could scarcely believe that the man before her, embittered by this ordeal and worn with suffering, was the ambitious, buoyant lad of a few short months before, whom disappointment and the shattering of his fondest illusion had failed utterly to cast down. He appeared weary, with a curious air of detachment, as if he were merely a bored spectator instead of the central figure in this portentous scene, where freedom, perhaps life itself, depended on the decision of the twelve individuals before him, cast in such vastly dissimilar molds.

But District Attorney Harker's trenchant voice claimed Mrs. Moffat's ear at length. With a due regard for the dramatic, he was extolling the beauty and virtues of the dead girl, picturing her as a simple little country maid, working industriously to earn her living, and unmindful of her charm.

Pursued by the attentions of her fellow boarder, who had conceived a blind infatuation for her, she had at first consented to give him her companionship out of pity for the affection which she could not return, but when he demanded too much, when he insisted, accompanying his unwarranted

claims by threats—as should be proven in good time to the gentlemen of the jury—when he attempted to coerce her into becoming his wife, linking her whole future with that of a man she did not love, then Frances Gillespie gently, compassionately, but firmly, refused to make this stupendous, absurd sacrifice.

With her refusal, revenge entered the heart of the man seated before them, and he resolved to take her life, that no other might ever find happiness with her. He described the supposititious murder with a wealth of graphic detail, and wound up with a peroration painting Henry Jordan in the most lurid colors and approximately likening him to the monsters of history.

When he had taken his seat, Mrs. Moffat felt her eyes drawn yet again to the prisoner. He seemed scarcely to have heard the denunciation as he sat staring straight before him with an odd tightening of the lines about his set mouth that might almost have been a shadow of a smile. All at once memory carried her back to the night of her arrival in the previous spring, when he had taken her to that sensational screen drama of faithless love and murder, and afterward defended, or at least excused, the slayer. With startling distinctness his very words came again to her mind: "Maybe he thought he had a right to kill her, same as he'd throttle a wild beast if he had nothing else to kill it with but his bare hands, to keep it from harming other people as it had him. . . . I believe there's apt to come a time in any man's life when he'd like to kill!"

Had he been perhaps unconsciously voicing his own sentiments? Was the thought already in his mind to take Fannie's life, not as the prosecutor declared, to prevent another from happiness with her, but as he himself had said of the pictured character: "Not for his own satisfaction, but because he had a right, it would be better if she were were dead."

But even as his words had returned to cast a first, faint shadow of doubt upon him in her thoughts, so the look in his eyes as for the moment he turned his head toward her dispelled it. Deeply encircled and drawn with mental anguish, they were yet

clear and steady, with no hint of fear or guilt in their calm, courageous glance. This boy could never, even in thought, have committed the hideous crime with which he was charged!

Lockwood Sterett had risen in his turn, and with consummate skill, to avoid a seeming disparagement of the dead girl, he managed to draw a subtly different picture of Fannie as a born coquette, instinctively aware of her attractions and rapacious for admiration, careless of the suffering she caused if by her blandishments she could command the entertainment her pleasure loving nature craved.

In sharp but apparently undesigned contrast, he described his client as a boy who worked his way through school while other lads played, who as youth and man had borne an unblemished reputation, commanding the respect and admiration of employers and associates alike, ambitious but conscientious, honorable and God-fearing.

He touched on the grave responsibility resting on the gentlemen of the jury when a man's life hung in the scales of their judgment, pointed to the pitfalls of circumstantial evidence, and assured them earnestly that he defense would refute conclusively the suggestion of their client's guilt.

With a nice regard for the power and emphasis of brevity, Sterett seated himself again beside his associates, giving no hint to the prosecution as to the line he proposed to take in vindicating the accused, and the real proceedings opened when Officer Burke was called to the stand.

After the usual preliminaries, the district attorney asked:

"Where were you at seven thirty-five on the morning of May 20, last?"

"The corner of Nint' Avenoo and Forty-Eight' Street, patrolling my beat," the policeman answered promptly in the singsong accents of an oft-told story.

"Describe what occurred then."

"A woman came running up behind and grabbed me by the arm. 'Twas Agnes, that's been chambermaid and waitress for Mrs. Horton at No. 326A since before ever I was detailed to that precinct. She was white as a sheet, with a wild look in her

eyes; and says she: 'Come quick, Mr. Burke! There's something wrong!' 'And what is it?' says I, coming along just the same. 'I don't know, but Miss Gillespie's door has got to be broke down! 'Tis locked from the inside, and she don't answer!'

"You hear the like of that from rooming houses more times than a few, and I took it on the double-quick, her trailing after. When we got to 326A the door was open, and a young man I'd not seen before dashing down the steps. He yelled something about 'Dr. Vaughn,' and I let him go, slamming the door and hurrying on up the stairs to the top floor, meeting no one on the way but Caroline, the cook, hollering in the hall. Mrs. Horton and another woman was holding on to each other on the top step of the last flight, and Henry Jordan, with no coat nor collar on him, was leaning over the rail in the upper hall."

He paused, for a little stir had run around the court room at his mention of the prisoner's name, but the prosecutor carried him on.

"You know these people?"

"Yes, sir, all but the lady with Mrs. Horton, and her I'd seen there off and on for years back. I asked Mrs. Horton what was wrong, and she said nothing, just pointed to the door of the little hall room at the rear. It was locked, all right, with the key turned in it from the other side, so I broke it down, taking myself in with it.

"'Twas dark, for though the window was open the shades had been pulled all the way down, but after a minute I made out a girl in a long, white nightgown hanging by a rope from the high brass bedpost. It was Fannie Gillespie, that I knew well, having seen her come and go from Mrs. Horton's for more than a year past."

He described Mrs. Horton's collapse, the return of the young man with the neighboring doctor, his own orders and message to the precinct station, while spectators and jury alike listened with absorbed attention. The defense had no questions to ask, and he was excused, giving place to Agnes.

The new witness was plainly nervous, but her sharp features bore a determined expression and she eyed the district attorney mutinously.



After drawing from her a corroboration of the policeman's testimony, he asked: "You'd waited on Miss Gillespie at the table and taken care of her room since she came to board at Mrs. Horton's?"

"Yes, sir."

"You also had charge of her mail and answered the telephone calls which came for her?"

"I did. She had lots of both, and my hands were full remembering the things to tell one gentleman and another." Agnes's nasal tones had quickened, as though she feared an interruption; but the prosecutor countered smoothly:

"Miss Gillespie was popular, you mean?"

Sterett made a show of objection, but Agnes was permitted to reply.

"She'd always followers dangling after her and kept them going real smart and clever."

It would have been impossible to tell from her tone whether she intended to convey admiration or censure, but the point told and the district attorney went on hastily:

"Miss Gillespie confided in you, then?"

"I've eyes in my head!" Agnes retorted, while a faint titter ran through the crowd of spectators. "There was no need of her telling me things."

The judge rebuked her sternly and then the prosecutor asked:

"Then did you observe when the prisoner at the bar began paying marked attention to Fannie Gillespie?"

There was no objection from the defense and Agnes nodded.

"Yes, sir. She'd been making eyes at him for months, but he couldn't see her, then all of a sudden he started taking her around and it was all up with him."

The tenor of her reply was unmistakable now and a wrangle ensued to have it stricken from the records, but it had registered and when the prosecutor strove to establish personal animosity on Agnes's part toward the dead girl he signally failed. Without pursuing the subject of her observations further he turned her over to the defense, contenting himself with repeated objections while Sterett adroitly drew from her a re-

ital of Fannie's fickleness and love of finery and excitement, as well as a wholehearted tribute to her beauty and charm that erased the impression of partiality. She left the stand, a distinct feather in the cap of the defense, and Dr. Vaughn was sworn in.

He recapitulated the incidents of the morning when the tragedy was discovered, detailing the obvious cause of death and approximate hour at which it had taken place, and then Sterett took him in hand.

"Doctor, have you ever in your professional capacity, encountered a death by hanging before?"

"Yes. Two of them, in fact." The doctor stroked his neatly clipped beard with flexible, tapering fingers.

"Were they suicides or murders?"

The district attorney's instant objection was overruled and Dr. Vaughn responded:

"Suicides, unquestionably. No doubt was entertained in either case."

"In your professional capacity, then, do you consider it likely or unlikely, possible or impossible, that a person could be forcibly taken from their bed and hanged without the least disturbance or outcry which would reach some ears in a quiet, sleeping household?"

This time the roar of objection was sustained, but the seed had been planted and as the occupants of the jury box glanced inadvertently at one another Mrs. Horton nudged her neighbor again.

"Get that, Mis' Moffat? Fighting right from the start, ain't he? I guess there won't much pass by him!"

Mrs. Moffat nodded with her finger on her lips. She had lost the next name called, but the stocky, thickset, sandy haired figure which mounted the stand was one she remembered. It was the detective from headquarters, Lieutenant Stevenson.

The spectators, too, evidently recalled his prominence in the investigation when the case first reached the press for a repressed murmur passed among them like a sibilant breeze, subsiding as the prosecutor began his questioning.

The detective described his examination of the room in which the girl had died and his discovery of the compromising letters which were submitted in evidence without

protest from the defense. After whetting the curiosity of the jury, the district attorney craftily left it unsatisfied and switched the topic to Stevenson's interview with the landlady; her admission that she could conceive no motive for suicide on Fannie Gillespie's part, her tribute to the girl's high moral character and general popularity, and account of her growing nervousness during the final weeks of her life culminating in the appearance of fear.

Mrs. Horton's broad face flushed and she compressed her lips when she heard herself quoted in the testimony, but the reference was soon concluded and led by the prosecutor Stevenson told of his survey of the roof, introducing in evidence also the rope which had suspended the body of Fannie Gillespie and the section of clothesline from which it had been severed.

"Did you observe anything else on the roof?" District Attorney Harker asked.

"Yes, sir. Footprints," replied the detective promptly.

"Were they the footprints of a man or a woman?"

"A woman."

"Will you tell the court, Lieutenant Stevenson, how you came to this conclusion?"

"I found the shoe that had made them and proved its ownership."

There was a sudden stir far back among the spectators and Caroline, resplendent in a bright purple gown and feathered hat, started to rise from her chair, but feeling curious, alien eyes upon her she subsided.

"Do you recognize this shoe?" The prosecutor held up the large but dilapidated specimen of footwear which the witness had used in his investigation and the latter nodded.

"Yes, that's the one. I found it with its mate down in the back yard of Mrs. Horton's house and Agnes said it belonged to the cook, and that she wore them hanging out wash, there and on the roof. I took it up to the roof and found it fitted perfectly into the prints; the only prints there."

A low mutter came from the indignant owner of the shoe, but it was lost in the district attorney's next question.

"Were there any further indications on the roof?"

"None that I saw. I went from there down to the room in which the body was found."

He continued, describing its furnishings and the clothing and toilet articles with the most minute detail, as well as the contents of the trunk. When he came to the photographs they were admitted in evidence and at length the subject of the letters was broached again. With telling effect the prosecutor quoted from them, reading aloud to the jury the most damaging passages written by Henry Jordan in the first bitter moments of his disillusionment, and although there was little outward manifestation of it the veering attitude of the men in the box could be almost felt. To Mrs. Horton's bewildered disapproval Lockwood Sterett interposed no objection until Stevenson's account of his examination of the accused man.

Then his protests came thick and fast, but they were of little avail. Henry Jordan had admitted his infatuation for Fannie Gillespie, but only when he saw that denial would be useless; he had been confused when the notes were produced, but confessed having written them, declaring that he had been "wild with jealousy and disappointment." He asked if he were being accused of her murder before the suggestion of it was made to him and did not deny it, merely reminding his questioner that the girl's door had been found locked on the inside; a trifling and irrelevant detail when entrance could have been as easily gained through the window.

In his ensuing examination of the witness Sterett tried by every artifice to amend his former testimony so as to mitigate its damning force, but Stevenson was wary and not to be shaken, and as he left the stand it was apparent that the prosecution had indeed scored.

Then a name was called at which the listeners gazed questioningly at one another and Mrs. Horton grasped the arm of the buyer from Ohio in troubled amazement.

"Evelyn Trimble."

A pale, angular woman with smooth bands of fair hair under her plain hat re-

peated the oath in a calm, low voice which penetrated to the uttermost corner of the great room.

"What is your profession, Miss Trimble?" the district attorney queried with urbane courtesy.

"I am a graduate nurse."

"What in the world—" Mrs. Horton began, but Mrs. Moffat silenced her.

"Were you actively employed on the nineteenth and twentieth of last May?"

"Yes, sir. From the first to the twenty-eighth on a pneumonia case."

"Where?"

"At No. 327-B West Forty-Seventh Street." The reply came with quiet precision, but the effect on several of her hearers was significant.

"That's just hack of us!" Mrs. Horton exclaimed in an irrepressible whisper. "What on earth can she know?"

"Were you on day or night duty, Miss Trimble?"

"Night duty, sir. My hours were from eight to eight."

"Where was your patient's room located?" The prosecutor's tone were bland.

"On the third floor, at the rear of the house; a private bath adjoined, also looking out on the rear."

"The view from the windows of your patient's room and that of the bath was of the back yards?"

"And the backs of the houses on the south side of Forty-Eighth Street." Miss Trimble nodded and added: "The rear of No. 326-A was directly opposite."

The purport of the questioning was apparent now to the spectators and again they stirred expectantly, but the district attorney continued without pause:

"Were you in the habit of glancing from these windows?"

"Occasionally, when my patient did not require my attention."

"Did you notice any particular window more than others?"

"Yes. The single one on the extreme right of the top floor of No. 326-A—my right as I faced it, I mean," the witness explained. "I was curious about it for there was a light there almost constantly."

"Did you observe it on the night of the 19th and 20th of last May?"

"I did. The window was open, but the white shade was drawn and the light on at eight o'clock when I came on duty. At nine when I gave my patient a stimulant I noticed from the bathroom where I rinsed the spoon that the light was out in the room opposite, but at eleven when I administered an opiate it had been turned on again and a figure was plainly outlined against the shade." Miss Trimble paused and added: "It was that of a woman in profile with both arms raised removing her hat; a small woman, very slender and girlish. I had seen it nearly every evening in that room since I went on the case."

"Please tell the gentlemen of the jury if you noted anything else that night?"

"Nothing for more than two hours. My patient was restless and demanded my attention constantly, but at twenty minutes past one I went into the bathroom once more to heat some milk. I remember the time because I noted it on my chart. The milk bottle was in a small ice chest under the window, and as I removed it I glanced out and up to that opposite window. At that instant the light there was extinguished."

"Did you consider that worthy of note?"

"Yes, because the light was frequently out until that hour or even later, but from whatever time it was lighted when the evening was far advanced until morning, between seven and eight o'clock, that light was always there. It was never put out, never on one single night!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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## CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

has written his greatest story. This is a sweeping assertion, but is not beyond the bounds of truth, as you will agree when you read it in this magazine. Watch for announcement of opening date.



# The Devil's Jest

By ROBERT TERRY SHANNON

VINCENTE ALESANDRO awoke, without apparent reason, and opened his eyes to the dim furnishings of his great bedroom. His mind began to clear slowly, and he realized that, somehow, he had pulled his consciousness up out of an abyssal black void. His body, which lay like a fragile husk under the light linen and silk covers of his mammoth bed of carved walnut, was peculiarly without sensation, as though it were in some way detached from his real being. His arm, when he tried to lift it, was inert and heavy. With an effort he pulled up a hand under the covers and felt at his breast for the pulsation of his heart. He was unable to detect any beat.

"This, then," said Vicente Alesandro to himself, "is death. I am still alive, but I am dying, exactly as it was explained. The heart, like an engine without power, is slowing down to a final stop."

The darkness, like an enveloping cloud, began to gather about his mind, but the will

to live a little longer stayed the man from sinking supinely into cushioned nothingness that represented death. There was no terror, no regret—if anything, there was satisfaction. His physician, who was a medical celebrity, had told Vicente Alesandro exactly what to expect. Acting accordingly, the man had done the things necessary to wind up his life in the manner which would give him the most satisfaction. The act of dying would be his last master stroke; it would represent his subtlest achievement. There was no sting, now, in the thought of death—and yet—

Vicente Alesandro summoned mental energy from some inner center and drew himself out of the shadowed borderland. Intellectually, he was quite ready to go, but the instinctive will of the animal brought him up, as from a great depth—brought him up fighting physically. The struggle was accompanied by a kind of friction, an increasing illumination, a sharpening of his faculties.

"Like a candle flaming up before it is extinguished," he told himself.

His dark, deep-set eyes roved the familiar room with its heavy carved furniture, its paintings and hangings. Vincente Alesandro had slept in the room for twenty years, since he had built the house when he was in the full flush of his middle age. And now he was withered like a tree without sap.

Beside his bed was a narrow table of polished wood. Reaching out, he touched the base of a small, parchment shaded lamp, and the room was softly illumined with a subdued glow. On an oval of ivory banded with a fretwork of silver was the miniature portrait of a woman, young, blond, and exquisite. Turning his head slightly, Vincente Alesandro regarded it with eyes that grew into hight, triumphant slits.

Suddenly his glance leaped away, toward the long brocaded portières that separated the room from the one adjoining, which was his study.

"Who's there?" he demanded in a voice brittle and alert.

No one answered. His attention sharpened to a keen, nervous edge; he was taut as a drawn wire; a renewed current of energy ran through his nerves. "Who is it?" he called sharply. "I saw that curtain move—I heard some one breathe!"

Again, silence. Craftily the hand and arm of Vincente Alesandro reached out to the end of the table that was nearest his bed. Following his fingers a smooth drawer slid out, and he possessed himself of a short, glistening revolver.

"I have a pistol pointed directly at that curtain—come out or I'll fire," he said with dry, nerveless composure.

The curtain moved almost imperceptibly. There was now, unmistakably, the sound of some one breathing.

"At once—or I fire!"

The curtain, defiantly, was brushed aside and there stepped into the room the slender, darkly clad figure of a man—a lean-faced man, with a sharp, protruding under jaw and thin lips askew with chagrin, or, perhaps, desperation.

"Well?" queried Alesandro.

The other tossed his head with a touch of bravado.

"All right—call somebody—send for the cops!" he enunciated in a strained voice. "You got me, ain't you?"

Vincente Alesandro was on one elbow, holding his weapon steadily. "Who are you—what do you want?"

"Most of all, I want to get away, but I guess there ain't a chance as long as you're pointin' that gun at my head."

Alesandro watched the man with a cat-like smile developing slowly. "You're not much of a hurglar, young man," he said, with a false note of humor. "You ought to wear a mask and a cap, and you most certainly ought to avoid capture by a bed-ridden invalid."

The intruder stood motionless, pallid.

"You can call your cop," he said tensely. "I ain't carryin' no weapons, an' I ain't took nothin' away from your house. The worst you can stick me for is unlawful entry, and maybe not that. Maybe I'm just a shell-shocked veteran that wandered into the wrong place."

For a moment Alesandro regarded his captive steadily with keen, searching eyes. Slowly he lowered the pistol and waved the other to a heavy chair near the foot of the bed. The hand that held the weapon lay lightly, but alertly, on the bed.

"You needn't trouble to start framing up an alihi," he said mockingly. "I can see that you're feeling pretty sick at your stomach right now; but you might as well get over that. You have stumbled into the only house in New York City where you would be welcome."

The man sank slowly into the designated chair, removed the soft felt hat he was wearing, and held it on his lap. In the faint light there was an almost vicious handsomeness in his sharply cut features, surmounted by a crop of crisp black hair. His gray eyes were perfectly steady now, as though he had obtained a fresh grip on his nerves.

"Well, what's the big idea?" he asked coolly, yet with something baffled in his tone.

"You've a hard nerve," Alesandro remarked.

"Maybe," the other admitted.

"And you've got a pretty big opinion of your own qualifications—vanity. Too bad you haven't intelligence as well. We're pretty much alike, you and I—except in the matter of intelligence. The difference is in degree, not kind. I probably have twice as much nerve—and vanity. That's why I'm talking so much—vanity. I've been forced to keep it under cover for years, but the necessity no longer exists. I'm free now from all restrictions. You see, your providential coming has caught me in a rare mood. I was preparing to die when I discovered you. I'll probably be dead before you leave the room."

Vincente Alesandro had been speaking with a studied, leisurely enjoyment. His eyes glistened. In his veins his Latin blood was pulsing warmly at a dramatic situation. The rôle of the bizarre, imperturbable *élegant*—even at the hour of death—reached a theatric strain in his nature. The growing bewilderment written on the features of the man before him gave an added filip to his pleasure.

"Let me tell you something, my friend," he went on smoothly. "I suppose this situation into which you have stumbled is without a parallel in the annals of burglary. You saw that the house was darkened. You thought, naturally, that it was empty—"

The burglar nodded. The tenseness was getting out of his body and his nerves. His eyes gave steady attention to the leathery face of Alesandro.

"And you found the master of the house unexpectedly at home. Unexpectedly, you were captured. Again the unexpected—I, Vincente Alesandro, am perhaps the only man in New York who wouldn't have shot you, or turned you over to the police. There is a brainless type of mind that asserts that all men are molded out of the same primeval mud—that they are all the same under the skin. Dolts! I'm not like any one now living. I'm a throwback. I'm one of the doges; perhaps a reincarnation of one of the dukes of Venice or Florence. I feel like one. But the chances are that you don't understand a word of what I'm getting at—you're just wondering what your chances are of getting away."

The other smiled faintly. "I'm figurin' on that all right," he admitted frankly, "but your drift, maybe, ain't as much over my head as you suppose."

"I hope not," Alesandro told him coldly, "but the chances are that you think I'm insane, whereas I am perfectly lucid in my mind. Just at the moment of my death a mysterious fate sends in a man like you to hear my deathbed confession. It is most gratifying. These last confessions, you know, are never given to clear a conscience. They're all the result of vanity—nothing more. I should have bated to die without the pleasure of confessing. The whole thing is such a beautiful jest."

"I told you this situation is without a parallel. And so it is. For the first time in the history of man the thief and his victim meet without any conflict of interest. I am dying. These things in this house which you came to steal—I cannot carry them with me. A dead man cannot own property. The minute my heart stops I cease to have any connection whatever with any earthly possessions. I shall be in a different medium where the material things of this life are without value. Perhaps, at the outside, I shall live an hour longer. These things are of no possible use to me in that short space of time. Therefore, in taking anything you may choose you are working no hardship upon me. You are depriving me of nothing that I need. When you leave this house I have not the faintest interest in what you take with you. You may take anything you like!"

Alesandro paused with a saturnine smile. At the foot of the bed the burglar was studying him with a puzzled frown. The hands that had hitherto lain motionless in his lap began now to move restlessly.

"If you feel that way about it, mister," he said, suddenly, "an' if you ain't holdin' no grudge against me—why, I'd just as soon clear out right now. I wouldn't bother to take anything with me, neither."

"Why?"

"From what you said—about dyin'—"

"You're afraid of death?"

Involuntarily the man shrugged. "You're so sure you're goin' to kick off—it's sort of cold-blooded. I'll tell you what I'll do,

mister—after I get out I'll telephone from some drug store for a doctor for you—on the level—"

Vincente Alesandro moved his revolver slightly.

"You'll stay right where you are," he said bloodlessly. "After all, you're just one of the common herd—sentimental. I've an odd story to tell; however, I'm not telling it for your benefit, but my own. Now, at the last, I realize that I've got to share it—to pour it into human ears, however unappreciative they may be. Vanity again. Strange, too. Until a short time ago I fancied I would be content to die with it locked in my breast. When you came the necessity for telling it came also—and I will not be cheated. Unless, of course, you try to escape, in which case I shall inevitably prevent you. The range is short. Beyond doubt I could drop you before you took two steps."

The burglar's restless fingers fished a cigarette and a match out of his vest. "Shoot!" he said crisply.

"Of course it is understood you'll take whatever you like from the house—when it's all over," Alesandro added. "Your predatory instincts will govern that."

The other's face flushed. "You don't hold a hell of a high opinion of me, do you?" he demanded with a sudden, unreasoning heat.

"I suppose I ought to start with my birth," Vincente Alesandro began, ignoring the words and the tone of his listener. "I am convinced that parentage counts for nothing. Somehow, I happened to be born of poor people down south of Washington Square a very long time ago. I bore their name; perhaps my flesh and blood partook of theirs. But not my *self*. No—that was different.

"They were content in their ignorance. I had a passion for education, for the fineness beyond their comprehension. It was extremely easy to gratify my desires. My intelligence was remarkable. There are books and teachers available in limitless numbers. But books were the most important. At twenty-one I was cultured, a gentleman. I moved uptown, and put behind me the squalor of the slums.

"But I did not lose touch with the people—my race—down there. I had a passion for money, and my people were simple—and greedy. It was no effort at all to get them to invest their savings with me, and I made money for them. Some of them.

"My astuteness enabled me to see that there was a fortune to be made in building houses, cheap apartments. I was very nearly infallible in my judgment. For a time I was absolutely honest, because I thought it was the profitable thing, but the process of acquiring wealth through honesty became too slow. Then I made my bargain with the devil, and he prospered me exceedingly."

The eyes of the burglar widened so suddenly and so remarkably that Vincente Alesandro checked his speech and a derisive chuckle arose in his throat.

"No, simpleton—I don't mean black magic," he said, contemptuous of the other's startled look. "I spoke figuratively. As soon as I was freed of the shackles of honesty I multiplied my opportunities a hundredfold, although the law did, in a degree, limit my workings.

"I found success—and failure. I failed with a woman—my wife." His glance rested momentarily on the ivory miniature on his table.

"She was a cold, northern lily. Her frigidity to me fanned me to a flame. I was aware that secretly she despised me—that she looked down upon me with the scorn of blue blood upon one of the *canaille*. You, of course, cannot understand how such a thing affected me. She was a living challenge. All that I had accomplished—all life—was futile as long as this one particular woman remained unattainable. Such is my nature. There remained but one object in life—to master her.

"First, I had to accomplish the impossible feat of marrying her. The task was doubly hard because she was in love with a worthless young artist, a starveling. No man who ever lived, except myself, could have accomplished what I did. No brain other than mine could have had the subtlety—no nature other than mine would have possessed the daring and the courage to make such a sacrifice.

"Her father was a man of money. I drew him into financial association with me. For a while I allowed him to prosper. Then—mark this well—I steered our partnership into failure. More—criminal failure. Her father not only stood to lose his integrity, but he faced prison. Apparently, he was guilty of fraud, while I was innocent. No court on earth could have decided otherwise.

"Can you not see the situation—the lever? Frankly, I made my terms—to the girl. I triumphed. The exposé came. I was ruined in reputation. It was impossible for me to continue in business, yet I had come out of the scandal with my fortune hidden away, intact. Money works wonders. I was acquitted legally—damned morally. But she was my wife. Her father died.

"Yet I failed. Even as I swindled her, so she swindled me. Legally she became my wife. She lived in my house. Her apartment in it is on the other side of the corridor. For twenty years she has kept me out of every phase of her life. With a stamina that is scarcely credible, she has ignored me. Yet she kept her pledge. She married me—nothing more."

The burglar in the chair stirred. "Well, what did you expect?" he demanded, forgetful of his own situation. "D'ye think she was goin' to fall on your neck after the way you framed her?"

Vincente Alesandro's lips tightened.

"I have said that I have a hard nerve and an inordinate vanity," he said coldly. "Another man would have shrugged and admitted defeat. I am different. I am capable of living out a single idea to its conclusion. I staked all on one card. Perhaps it is all vanity—it matters not.

"But I have a clear mind. From the beginning I saw that victory was impossible. It was beyond any power I had to triumph over her spirit. Did I quit? There was still one compensating opportunity left for me. Do you know what it was?"

The burglar shook his head.

"Revenge!"

The word was a hiss in the throat of the man on the bed.

"But it must not be crass—common.

It had to be a revenge that was beautiful—it had to be expressive of my personality. You would have beaten her. I—I would wound the spirit. My wife, as a girl, had never learned the value of money. She had no idea whatever of its importance. From childhood it had flowed like an endless stream into her hands. Her attitude toward it was impersonal. I imagine that she thought no more of it than she did of the air she breathed.

"Cannot you see what a weapon I possessed? I placed large sums to her credit in a checking account. She has always had all she wanted. The fine things of life, the expensive luxuries—they are her necessities. In accepting money from me she was scarcely aware of its source. Certainly she never fully realized it. Merely, she was drawing on the same inexhaustible supply she had always known. I went to the pains to see that she drew it even from the same bank through which her father had handled her allowances. But, as my wife, there was more. There was more for her charities, her clothes, her cars, jewels—everything. And through all of these years our relations have been—formal. You see, I foresaw that I would die long before she did. Her age now is forty. The best part of her life remains. She is without any relatives whatever. I am her only source of supply. Ah—but I observe that you have not yet begun to see what I am aiming to do!"

The eyes of the burglar were hard. A pool of a scowl had formed between his brows. He was silent. Again there was something reminiscently catlike in the face of Vincente Alesandro as he moistened his lips with his tongue.

"Perhaps you have never heard of Gustav von Boehm," he took up his narrative again. "He is the greatest living specialist on diseases of the heart. A year ago, because he is a wise man, he came out of Germany. He came to put his great skill on the market. I have had heart trouble. He has treated me. From the beginning he told me frankly there was no hope. I have been doomed for years. Now, I am at the end. He described how the final seizure would come to me. That man knows my interior as a watchmaker knows the wheels



of a watch. I have paid him thousands of dollars—for information.

"Is it not plain, then, what I have done? As the time drew short I began to convert my assets into cash. Death—I can snap my fingers at death. Do you know the easiest way to get rid of money—more than a million? The stock market—you can lose it without the slightest chance of ever getting it back. But this house remained, the cars and jewels. Well, she knew nothing of business. Quite willingly, she signed any papers I presented. Mortgage after mortgage, clear up to the hilt and beyond. The money so realized went into the same maw and disappeared. Our current expenses—borrowed. The time was short; they would not press the debts.

"And now—I die. And she—I have not victory, but I have that which is equally sweet—revenge. She who was used to every luxury that money could buy—she who lived as a princess—she will go out into the world at forty—a pauper."

The burglar half smiled. "That's a scream!" he muttered.

Alesandro did not bear him. "Fate has been sweet to me. Everything is swept away—I die just in time. Already there are the first faint rumblings of the coming crash. One of my creditors telephoned me to-day. I put him off—"

"That's a scream!" the burglar muttered again.

For a moment the room was silent, and then came the swift, startling ringing of a telephone in the room. The eyes of both men widened.

"Hand it to me," Alesandro commanded. "I'll answer."

The instrument at the end of a long cord was lifted from a stand by the burglar and placed in the hands of the recumbent man.

"Yes . . . this is he . . . *you—what!*"

Suddenly the sound of a French clock on a mantel of Carrara marble became distinctly audible as Vincente Alesandro's face began slowly to grow livid as he listened to the voice that came through the receiver pressed tightly against his ear. A whimsy played around the thin lips of the burglar as he looked upon the startled anguish on the face of the older man.

"Gee, it's a scream!" The thin lips formed the words soundlessly.

Vincente Alesandro, with a palsied hand, put the receiver on the hook. His lids fluttered to a close. His lips had become ashen. Presently he spoke in a voice that was as dry, as hopeless, as dust.

"She—she met him this afternoon—the starveling artist. She is sailing to-morrow for Paris—for a divorce. He—he has attained fame, wealth." A paroxysm of defeat shook the frame of Vincente Alesandro. "But I won't live to suffer—thank God! I am dying."

The burglar grinned.

"Holy smoke—this *is* a scream!" he broke out without restraint. "Don't you ever read the newspapers? This Von Boehm you was tellin' me about—didn't you read about him in to-night's paper? Say, he's a fake! The real Von Boehm's still in Germany. This hird here is pinched—picture on the front page. He's been gettin' slews of rich guys an' tellin' them they was about to die. He'd scare 'em to death and then milk 'em right. An' you fell for that faker! It's a million to one that your heart's as sound as a dollar watch. Gee, it's a scream! An' you shot every dime you had just to leave the dame in the lurch. Say, you ain't goin' to die—you're goin' to live for a long while, flat, busted! You're goin' to *live!*"

Calmly the burglar picked up his hat, placed it on his head, and strode to the brocaded portière that led into the next room, where there was an open window and a fire escape. At the exit he stopped and looked back with a grin.

"You poor fish!" he laughed, in farewell.

Vincente Alesandro picked up the shining pistol and pressed it against his heart, which now was beating firmly and evenly. His finger sought the trigger—and hesitated. Then, swiftly, as though the weapon burned his fingers, he flung it across the room.

"No! No!" he cried in an access of hither realization. "I cannot kill myself—I have not the courage. I am doomed to live!"



# Another Woman's Life

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE BARONESS CALLS.

MARCUS PHARE made himself conversant with the way of Jenny's working life. He could not be said to persecute her; he was most discreet and careful not to cause the slightest breath of gossip. But he knew all about her.

He had a cousin, Mrs. Ralph Tovey, a very smart woman. With her he once attended a fashion parade at the big Knightsbridge shop. Jenny saw him.

She hated him to be there as much out of professional pride as anything else. This was so different from Mme. Lacour's. In Deal Street, in that old world, spacious house, everything had been perfect. Here in the great show rooms the carpets were not over clean, and there was too much light, and the models were apt to get soiled through being shown so often. One dress would be copied over and over again with very trivial differences. Such a thing was impossible at Mme. Lacour's.

Mrs. Tovey ordered a gown from a model Jenny was wearing. This meant that the girl had to walk about in front of her. Phare kept silence, lounging in his chair, a half smile on his lips. Jenny did not know whether he had told his cousin anything.

The next day was a Sunday and Jenny had been bound to accept a luncheon invitation from Phare. Her feelings toward him had in no wise changed; but she rebelled a trifle less acutely at going about with him. She was getting used to it. She dared not resist his will. He had a bold over her that would only relax when Prince Nicholas was safely married.

Of course, these outings were a break in her dull life. And Phare behaved very well. He had not mentioned the prince for some time. It was a fortnight since Jenny had said good-bye to Nicholas. Nor did Phare often speak of his feelings for her; but he had an irritating way of assuming that she was going to marry him.

"My cousin, Mrs. Tovey, thought you quite charming," said Phare at lunch.

*This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 24.*

"I wish you wouldn't bring your friends there," Jenny retorted.

"I'm sorry. Does it make you feel uncomfortable? I naturally want to know how you live. And I can hardly come alone. They'd think I was on the prowl. But you oughtn't to be there. It's no place for you."

"I don't mind it."

"You ought to mind it. Do you have to work hard?"

"Not exactly. But there's a lot of dusting and cleaning up and you never know when you will be wanted. And there are lots of women who come in and make you put on about two dozen models and go away without giving an order, and that makes the heads of the show room furious and they blame us. It's such a waste of time."

"You're an extraordinary girl," commented Phare.

A few minutes later he said:

"Prince Nicholas is going it pretty strong from all accounts."

Jenny started. She had thought of him as hack in his own country.

"Have you heard about it?" Phare asked.

"No."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"No."

"So you took my advice. Wise girl! That young man couldn't be the slightest good to you. It seems he's staying on here incog. I suppose he visits the archduchess now and then and has a good time in between. There are wild tales about. He's never seen without Trixi Almette, the French music hall star. She's a London girl, really. I saw him myself at the Metropolitan Club last night. He was with her and a decidedly rapid gang. They say he's sworn everybody to secrecy. Most of the people at the Metropolitan had no idea who he was."

"Trixi was in great form. She's about the commonest little beast on the stage. She was dressed in a pink chiffon scarf and a row of pearls as big as marbles. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good."

Jenny sat stiff with misery. She knew that he was trying to make her miserable.

She wouldn't believe these ugly tales. She hated him for telling them.

Phare offered her his cigarette case.

"You were sensible to listen to me, Jenny. He's been brought up to think he owns the earth and everything on it—particularly the women."

She longed to say: "I don't believe you." But what was the good?

Back in her own little drah room she gave herself up to a storm of weeping. She spent the rest of the day alone. Phare had motored down to Brighton for a dinner engagement with a Hungarian prince, who, he hinted, might have very interesting news to impart to him about Count Saxt.

By night Jenny was demoralized, washed out with hours of miserable brooding.

Nicholas had gone from her. She had sent him away. She could not hear her life. He would marry the archduchess, and he would amuse himself. That was what Phare had said. She could be nothing in his life. There was nothing that she could be.

By the time she crept into her bed under the dingy coverlet, racked with longing and with loneliness, she told herself that she would be glad to be a Trixi Almette, if she could only be with him, if he only looked into her eyes and laughed and never thought of her again.

On the following evening Jenny received a visit from the Baroness Dora Luini.

This time she had to see her in her own room. There was nothing pleasing to the eye in it except herself and a bunch of violets that Phare had given her.

She was not looking her best. It had been a trying day. Monday always was. The cinema, the restaurants, the country, the river—all were too vivid in the young ladies' minds. They were mostly inclined to shirk their work and leave it to anybody who would do it. Jenny had done a great deal more than her share, while the other girls stood in groups or in couples, and the all-absorbing "He said to me" and "I said to him" passed from the lips of one to the other.

They took no notice of Jenny. How commonplace their own little adventures

would have seemed to them, if they had known what secrets were locked away in her breast! They liked her. The more generous among them thought her lovely. But the general feeling was that she was no sport. She had no young man to take her to cinemas and cheap restaurants, and the "Palais de Danse" knew her not. They did not, like Mme. Lacour's young ladies, penetrate into the restaurants where they might have seen her with Marcus Pbare.

The baroness looked old, Jenny thought. At first she took it for an ordinary visit—at least, not ordinary, but without any special purpose. It was kind of the baroness to come.

She asked after Jenny's health. She learned about Bertie's death and was very sympathetic. She made some vague general remarks.

The conversation flagged, and then Jenny knew that there was something more to expect.

"Have you seen Prince Nicholas?" the baroness asked.

"Not lately," the girl answered.

"But you have seen him? He made me give him your address. He was determined to see you."

"Yes, I saw him," Jenny admitted.

The baroness lifted a forlorn face. Her shoulders heaved in a helpless way.

"Oh, my dear, we're in such trouble! The prince refuses to marry the archduchess."

Jenny bated herself for the pang of joy that she could not repress.

"He has told me so." The precise voice broke in despair. "He has been down to see her Imperial highness two or three times. It was the last time. He told me so that I could tell her and we could arrange that the engagement should be broken off from her side. It is dreadful for me. The archduke has almost lost his mind. I mean, he is childish. It's no good talking to him. He is going rapidly to pieces. He never leaves the war maps now. We can with difficulty get him to eat. So, you see, there's only me. The archduchess doesn't care."

"I am very sorry," murmured Jenny. "It must be dreadful for you."

"I have come to you for help."

"To me?"

"Yes. You are the only person who can help us."

"I? But how?"

"The prince is fond of you. You can influence him."

"How could I possibly influence him?"

"The archduchess says so. You see, she has seen him. She is a girl like you are. She knows. She says he is in love with you. She says he doesn't think about anybody but you. There are dreadful stories of his goings on here in London. She says he's doing it because he can't be with you, because you are not the archduchess, as he thought you were. She is sure she knows."

"But," faltered Jenny. "I don't understand."

"You could tell him that he must marry the archduchess. You could influence him. It is his duty. He can't honorably leave her in the lurch. He ought to see that what we did we did in all good faith. He ought to be made to see it."

"Does the archduchess want to marry the prince?" Jenny asked.

"I don't know that she wants to. But she sees that she must. There is her position. The betrothal is known everywhere. You know the truth. It's useless to pretend to you. She has told me that you know. Count Saxt has deserted her. Their marriage is being annulled by the Pope. This marriage with Prince Nicholas is a settled thing. Everybody expects it. All sorts of political complications might arise if it doesn't take place."

"What can I do?" asked Jenny.

"You can urge him to marry the archduchess. You can point out his duty to him. Forgive me—you can point out to him that you can never be anything in his life. Will you not do this?"

The poor lady was carried away with her desperate desire. Her plight was pitiful. In her frail person was concentrated by proxy all the greatness and pride of the house of Rosemark's mighty empire from medieval days. She seemed to be left to lift up the dynasty on her strong, supporting heart. She pleaded as if for her own honor and her own life.

"The prince," said Jenny, "knows that I can never be anything in his life."

"Think of the empress!" implored the baroness. "The archduchess is thinking of her. Stephanie is selfish enough, Heaven knows, but to save the faintest breath of scandal about her grandmother she is willing to marry the prince."

"I don't think the prince would listen to me," Jenny said.

"You stand in the way. Stephanie is sure of it. He has as much as said so. He loves you. His thoughts are fixed on you. Oh, if only you were engaged to another man! If only he could be persuaded that you could never be anything in his life! If only you were going to marry another man!"

Jenny smiled a little bitterly.

"But I am not," she said. "And I think the archduchess exaggerates."

"She is sure she doesn't. She is convinced that if the prince knew definitely that you were out of his reach, things would be different."

"He does know it."

"But you will help us all the same? You won't refuse? You will see the prince and speak to him?"

Jenny felt an angry revolt rise in her. The same utter disregard for her. She was to tear her heart to pieces again, to see the prince again, when she had said good-by to him forever in order to persuade him to marry Stephanie!

Her impulse was to refuse point blank. Hot words of wrathful reproach trumbled on her lips.

But the baroness's face stopped them. She looked old, shrunken, desperate.

"For the empress's sake," she pleaded. From her rich sepulchre the wonderful old lady was demanding service from the girl who had already given so much.

"I will do what I can," Jenny said slowly. "Oh, but if I had only known! I would never have begun it—never, never!"

Sheer agony was in her brown eyes. There were no questions in them. Only stark suffering.

"You have been so good," said the baroness helplessly. "Oh, my dear, I do hope that one day you will be very happy!"

She recovered herself quickly. She was all eagerness. "How shall we manage about the prince? Do you know where to find him?"

"Yes," Jenny said. "He told me he was staying at his embassy. I thought he had gone back to Galmatia, but I heard yesterday that he was still here."

"Yes, he's going about with very undesirable people, and dreadful women. Oh, and he seemed such a nice young man! Will you write to him, my dear?"

"I suppose that will be best. But it will be very difficult. I must think about it. It must seem natural, or he won't take any notice."

The baroness rose, gratitude pouring from her lips.

"Oh, how I wish you would be sensible and let us do something for you!" she said. "You ought not to be in a room like this. You ought to have pretty things and to enjoy yourself."

"I am quite happy as I am," Jenny answered. "I have always worked. But you are very kind."

"And you will let me know what happens?"

"Yes, at once."

"Oh, I pray you may be successful!"

"I will do my best," Jenny's voice sounded dull.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### JENNIE DEALS HER BLOW.

"WILL you take me to the Metropolitan Club?" Jenny asked Marcus Phare the next day, speaking over the telephone.

"Good gracious, yes!" he answered in surprise. "But what ever makes you want to go there? I shouldn't have thought it was your style at all." Curiosity came into his voice. "What is the idea, eh?"

"Oh, nothing," she answered carelessly. "I only thought I'd like to go there. I've heard such a lot about it. And I feel dead-bly dull."

But she knew that it was not dullness. It was death—the death of joy and hope and youth in her heart.

"I know why you want to go," said Phare's voice.

She did not mind. She had passed into another world, metaphorically speaking.

"I can't promise that he will be there," Phare added, with subtle mockery.

"I don't know what you mean," Jenny said.

She dressed herself with great care when the time came. She had made herself a frock of black *peau de soie*, rigorously plain. She was no needlewoman, but she had a sort of instinct for line and drapery, and, though her stitches were clumsy, the effect was good. She had bought the stuff at a special price from her shop. The subdued rich material accentuated the dense whiteness of her skin. Her hair, burnished by much brushing, lay like a crown close to her small head. Its dark gold was almost metallic. Some of her tenderness had gone; its place was taken by a mysterious expression that baunted one. It was unexpected suffering, and difficult for the casual observer to define.

They did not dine at the Metropolitan Club, but went on there afterwards.

Over dinner, Phare tried to probe her mind.

"It's because you've heard that Prince Nicholas has been at the Metropolitan that you want to go there, isn't it?"

"Not entirely," she said.

"I'm sure it is. You want to see Trix Almette. Well, I expect they'll be there all right. They say she gets a new pearl necklace every day. I didn't bear anything about Count Saxt," he added. "He seems to have disappeared. I suppose he's made a pretty penny out of this. He was as poor as a church mouse.

Jenny listened, hardly hearing. Her mind was fixed on the task ahead of her.

The Metropolitan astonished her. It was a very plain looking place; oak paneling and plaster ceiling, a comparatively small dancing floor, and two rows of small tables all round.

Phare had a table in one of the corners. They sat down and had coffee. The place was almost empty. Phare nodded to several men. One he introduced to Jenny—Lord Frederick Gore-Tempest, a middle-

aged, open-faced individual with the stamp of country life on every inch of his spare figure.

He asked her to dance. She danced by instinct, and he was a perfect partner. Phare never danced.

Jenny appeared quite gay. She had by no means forgotten Bertie; but she had a purpose. Girls in her way of life could not adhere strictly to social rules. To isolate themselves because of mourning would lead many of them to the verge of melancholia.

The room filled up. It was what they called a "gala" night. Strings of colored air balloons appeared and were distributed. The little tables were covered with bottles, ordered so as not to clash with the licensing laws.

Jenny sat opposite Phare, and danced intermittently with Lord Frederick Gore-Tempest.

At midnight the place was packed. Jenny was dancing. A couple passed her. She saw a whirl of white tulle skirts and a brilliant emerald green bow on a mop of tow-colored hair, a vividly painted *gamine* face, with a snub nose and a broad scarlet mouth, and the strings of enormous pearls that Phare had told her about.

Trix Almette! Her partner was Prince Nicholas. Between them they carried six red and green balloons.

Jenny's heart gave a great thud and then seemed to stop beating. Tears rose to her eyes. The sight of him was enough, his handsome face, his reckless eyes, his flying feet.

Presently he walked by with another woman, as she sat at the table with Phare and Lord Frederick. He bowed to her with a little frigid smile, and she thought he looked furious.

She sat there, not knowing how to get into touch with him. He settled the question by coming up to her and asking her to dance. Phare was alone with her. He gazed abstractedly at the dancers, as if he was not aware of the young man's presence.

Jenny and Nicholas moved away. The prince put his arm round her and they danced as far as the doorway.

"There is a room through here," Nicho-

las said. "Come along! I want to talk to you."

It was a small room at the far end of two others. In the daytime it was used as a card room.

"What are you doing here, Jenny?" Nicholas asked as he shut the door.

"What are you doing?" she answered, smiling. "Enjoying yourself."

"You're wrong," he said, his eyes dark and stormy. "I am not enjoying myself. I'm killing time."

"Surely you have plenty to do?"

"I don't want to do it. What's the matter with you? You're horrid. Jenny, don't you love me any more? Aren't you sorry you were so cruel? You look so adorable to-night."

"Please, your royal highness! We agreed that we mustn't say such things. You are going to marry the archduchess."

"I'm *not* going to marry the archduchess! I'll never marry any woman but you. There you are, Jenny! If I cannot have you, I'll die a bachelor."

He came near to her, masterful, exuberantly alive.

"Oh, no," she said; and she marveled at the coolness of her own voice. "You mustn't think of such things. I don't think you understand. I'm engaged."

He looked at her, and inwardly she shivered.

"You can't mean that," he said thickly.

"Yes, I do. I'm engaged to be married to Mr. Phare, the gentleman I am with to-night."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### FOR THE LAST TIME.

THERE followed a short scene that left Jenny shattered and broken, and faced with the end of all things.

The prince crushed her in his arms. He pleaded with all the fire and eloquence of his passionate youth. He swore by all he held holy that he would never marry Stephanie or any one else. He implored her to wait—only to wait. They loved each other. Some way must be found. If only she would wait.

She must not engage herself to any man. She must not marry. She was his and his alone. She could not be so mad, so wicked as to fling their love aside.

His voice was a torrent sweeping her along. Her own replies were thin and spiritless. And yet she was firm.

It could be no good. It could be no good. That was her refrain. He was a prince and she was a manikin. Even if they waited forever and ever, could anything come of their love?

In the end it maddened him. He grew hard, arrogant, cruel. He flung bitter words in her face. She was selling herself for money. She was no better than the women of the streets. She was only playing with him all the time.

She stood passive, humble, distractingly lovely.

But she was firm. She did her duty as she saw it. He was a prince. He would one day be a king. It was right that he should marry Stephanie of Rosemark. Her world and his could never touch.

In the end his anger overcame even his manners, and he flung himself out of the room, leaving her to find her own way back to the ballroom.

Phare was looking for her, and shortly afterward they left.

Her last glance showed her Trixi Almette in the prince's arms, whirling around like a dervish. There was a look of disgust on several faces. Jenny heard a man who did not know the prince mutter:

"Really, I think they ought to be more careful about letting these foreigners in. They don't know how to behave themselves."

Jenny did not tell Phare of her decision to marry him that night. She could not bring herself to speak the words.

But she wrote to him before she went to bed.

DEAR MR. PHARE:

If you still want to marry me, I am willing to be your wife.

Yours truly,  
JENNY DEVON.

It was clumsy, even ridiculous. But she could think of nothing else to say.

She posted it on her way to business the next morning.

He rang her up at the shop before she left and made an appointment for dinner.

His eager eyes were shining. There was a little tremor of excitement in his quiet voice as he greeted her.

"Thank you, Jenny. That's the nicest letter I've ever had in my life."

His manner was as perfect as ever. He talked less than usual and studied her face attentively.

"Had last night at the Metropolitan anything to do with it?" he asked her.

"What do you mean?"

"Were you disgusted with your prince?"

"Please, Mr. Phare—"

"Mr. Phare! My name is Marcus."

"Please, Marcus!" She flushed painfully. "I would rather not talk about his royal highness. It is very—very awkward for me."

"Are you going to see him again?"

"No. Why should I?"

"That's all right. I believe in keeping out of danger. You really are a very extraordinary girl. And now let's make plans for the future."

Jenny was firm on one point. She would stay on at her work until the marriage. She did not demur when he suggested a date barely six weeks from then. But she breathed a sigh of pathetic relief when she heard that he was obliged to go over on a flying trip to New York before the ceremony. He would be away a month in all.

It was a blessed respite. She could hardly believe her good fortune.

He drove her home in his great car. In a quiet and dark Bloomsbury street he took her in his arms and kissed her. She all but cried aloud in her distress. How could she go through with it?

The kisses of love had been so lately on her lips, the glad, glorious kisses of youth and romance and passionate surrender. These were the kisses of the man who had bought her—not with money, but with his power to take her out of Prince Nicholas's reach.

That was Jenny Devon's price.

A week later Marcus Phare sailed. On Jenny's left hand was a magnificent square

emerald. She did not wear it in business hours.

On the same day she received a letter from the Baroness Dora Luini.

I can never thank you. You have behaved faultlessly. If only we could do something for you. All is well here now. I wonder how you managed it. You are as clever as you are kind. H. I. H is behaving beautifully; too. I really believe in the end it will be a success.

So Jenny's sacrifice had borne fruit. Evidently Prince Nicholas was resigned to marriage with Stephanie. And she to union with him.

It was a success. Everybody was pleased and relieved. There would be no scandal. The empress's memory was safe.

Before Jenny the future loomed intolerable—a dreadful dark river into which she was forced to plunge.

She had done what she believed to be the right thing to do. But she found no comfort in it.

The next day she saw in a picture paper a photograph of the Archduchess Stephanie and Prince Nicholas receiving a deputation from the Galmatian colony in London. It was announced that the wedding would take place in October.

But Fate had not done with Jenny yet.

Five days after Marcus Phare sailed, she came back to her lodging on a Saturday afternoon to find a note that her landlady told her had been left by a messenger boy.

She opened it and read:

I shall be waiting at the end of your street at four o'clock. Please come there. I must see you. It is most important. N.

It was Prince Nicholas's handwriting. Jenny felt a queer thrill go through her. What could he want with her now, when everything was going so well? She was a little angry. She felt like some hunted creature. Couldn't he leave her alone? Hadn't he done her enough harm?

Miserable, but strangely excited, she went to keep the tryst.

Nicholas was just turning the corner from a side street when she reached the appointed place. He wrung her hand without a word.



He looked as if he were doing something he hated.

"I want you to come back to the castle," he said. "Where can we go and talk?"

"Regent's Park," suggested Jenny faintly. "I don't understand."

"Never mind. Here's a taxi. Get in!"

They drove to the gates of the park. It looked beautiful, with its glowing flower beds, and the happy children and all the older folk basking in the sunshine.

"Show me a place where there aren't any people," the prince said.

Jenny led the way into a secluded walk. There was a seat under some hawthorn trees, and they sat down.

"Stephanie has gone again," Nicholas said.

"Gone again!" echoed Jenny.

"Yes. She's fooled us again. She always meant to." His voice was dark with anger. "For the sake of—well, God knows for the sake of what!—I agreed to go on with the farce. I suppose it was chiefly because you told me it was my duty. We were to be married in October, as you've probably heard. You were lost to me, anyhow, so I didn't care. She was supposed to be willing. So I was staying at the castle, and we were ostensibly on the best of terms. And this morning we find that she's gone."

"Where?" asked Jenny.

"The baroness believes that Saxt has sent for her again. She is evidently infatuated. She would go wherever he called her. I suppose I ought to understand that, Jenny. I'd go wherever you called me."

"Don't!" the girl exclaimed. His voice, so angry, so hurt, so humiliated, stabbed her to the heart.

"The idea is," he went on, "that my aunt, the Queen of Nordland, is over here on a private visit. She is my mother's youngest sister. She is coming to stay at the castle. She arrives to-morrow. We can't put her off. She is coming to meet Stephanie. And Stephanie is not there. So, if you would be so awfully decent as to come back to the castle while she is there—"

The young voice trailed off in furious disgust.

"You ask me to do this!" said Jenny, hardly believing her ears.

"I can't help myself. The baroness wouldn't do it—that's a fact. She is in a dreadful state, poor soul! I said I'd ask you, but I didn't think it would be much good."

"Why do you want me to do it?" she asked.

"To gain time. My aunt won't stay long."

"Is that all?"

"Oh!" He laughed with a sort of dismal violence. "To be frank because I don't want to look a fool."

"How would my coming to the castle prevent that?"

"Well, I suppose we could concoct some story—given a little time. We've done it before, haven't we?"

"I see. You remember that I am engaged to be married?"

He nodded.

"I'm not likely to forget it. I told the baroness I didn't suppose you'd do it on any account."

Mr. Phare is on his way to America," Jenny said. "I don't know whether he'd mind or not. As a matter of fact, he knows all about it."

"You told him!" cried the prince accusingly.

"No. He came with that deputation from the hospital to present the wedding gift. He recognized me then."

Suddenly Nicholas clutched her hand.

"Is that why you are marrying him?" His eyes glowed.

Jenny thought for a moment, and then said slowly:

"I am marrying him because I think it is the best thing I can do."

"The best! But not the thing you want to do? Oh, Jenny, I can't stand this lying! Are you marrying him because, if you didn't, he might tell?"

She could not speak. She hung her head. He gripped her hand until she cried out with pain.

"Will you come?" he asked dully.

"Yes," she said, equally dully, "I will come. It will be for the last time, won't it, Nicholas?"

"For the very last time," he answered gloomily. "We will hurry everything that has happened between us, you and I."

## CHAPTER XXV.

## ACTING ONCE MORE.

BACK to the rouge pot and the powder puff and the lip salve! Back to the beautiful clothes and the ruby ring, that Stephanie had left behind her on her dressing table without a line of comment or farewell.

On what mysterious pilgrimage had that strange girl set out? Was it the irresistible call of love? Had the man she had given her heart to the power to draw her after him wherever he went, even after he had shamed and deserted her? Was that the kind of stuff she was made of under her hard, cynical, daring ways?

Jenny sent a telegram to the shop where she worked, saying that she was unexpectedly called away on urgent family matters. It would not matter whether she went back there or not. Nothing mattered—now.

Nicholas was just as ready to use her as the rest of them. Between them they would gradually crush the life out of her—to safeguard their position and their pride.

She felt broken, dull, indifferent. Nothing mattered now.

It felt strange to enter the castle walls again. She drove down by the car, and the great pile looked like a fairy city in the June sunlight, set in the midst of its vast woods of ancient beeches, oaks, and elms.

The Archduke Gabriel was confined to his own apartments. His mind was going rapidly, and he was under constant medical supervision.

Jenny saw Prince Nicholas before dinner. She was all prepared—powder and paint and hair. She had even achieved a smile that felt as if it were nailed to her lips.

"His royal highness insists on seeing you alone," said the baroness nervously. She looked as if she had lost her grip on things. "Of course, it will be easier for you, won't it, now he knows? But, remember, he may

be in a reckless mood. He has been completely fooled this time. We are going to dine in the small dining room belonging to the cedar suite, so you had better see him in the china room. I needn't ask you to be careful. I know you will be."

"You needn't be afraid," said Jenny quietly. "His royal highness and I know exactly where we stand."

So it was in the little cedar-lined China room of dear and cruel memories that they met.

Nicholas was pale. His eyes smoldered. There was a dangerous curve in his lips. His first words to her were abrupt and rude.

"I almost hate you with that powder and paint on your face. To think that you've got to do it because of that— But I won't offend your ears! I can't speak of her in decent language. It was good of you to come, but I think I hate you for coming. A pretty farce, isn't it? And for the first time the two of us are in it."

"You told me that you wished me to come," Jenny said as calmly as she could.

"Of course there's nothing else for it. My aunt, the Queen of Nordland, is a bit of a hussybody. She would have ferreted everything out. And until I know what's become of that wretched—oh, what's the good? I'm not in the mood to confess that I've been made a fool of. When we've got rid of my esteemed aunt, I shall settle everything once and for all."

Jenny played nervously with some flowers on a table.

He caught her roughly in his arms and kissed her.

"Oh!" She put her hand to her lips as if he had hurt her. His strength overmastered her. It was something she couldn't fight against.

"I ought not to be here," she murmured. "If I am to stay, you must—"

"Behave!" he put in, with repressed fury. "What mad things you women do! You love me and you know I love you, and you go and promise yourself to another man. What for? To get out of my reach, I suppose. And because this man you are going to marry knows the truth. But you'll never get out of my reach. You love me. You are mine. You'll always be."

She gave a little sob.

"Ob, don't cry!" he exclaimed sardonically. "You'll mess up all that stuff on your face. Don't worry. I'll behave. I understand. You and I are the sport of the gods. And you are spoiling your life for my sake and I can never do anything in return. No doubt I shall get over it. There is plenty of fun to be got out of life."

She thought of the "other women," of the Trixi Almettes, and her heart was pierced with jealousy and despair. For him there was "fun." But for her—nothing, nothing! Life with Marcus Phare; a life of horror.

The Queen of Nordland arrived on the Sunday afternoon. She was on her way south to Galmatia to visit her sister, and she was spending a few days in England, strictly incognito.

She was a woman of thirty-five, who looked at least five years younger. She had a clever dark face and beautiful glossy black hair, and she was extremely smart and well turned out. She was a modern woman in every sense of the word.

Her country was a very democratic one, which suited her exactly, for she had no patience with court etiquette and loathed ceremonies. From the first she deprecated the endless curtsies and the artificial formalities of the castle, and laughingly said that it reminded her of a medieval tomb.

She was a widow, with three children, and she was the regent during her eldest son's minority. He was a boy of fifteen. She was a great traveler, a brilliant talker, and was known all over Europe for her broad views and her encouragement of education and of the arts.

It was somewhat unkind of Nicholas to call her a busybody, but she was undoubtedly intensely interested in everything and everybody. And, only too naturally, in the girl her handsome nephew was going to marry."

"You must call me Aunt Adela," she said to Jenny, when the girl was presented to her. "And we must be great friends."

On the day of her arrival she was a little tired; but the next morning she made the girl take a long walk in the park with her.

"My sister will want me to tell her all about you," she said in her vivacious voice. "So I must find things out. It was too sad that your grandmother should die just then. But my sister hopes you will be able to go and spend a week or two with her at the end of July in the mountains. And I understand the wedding will probably take place in Galmatia now."

Jenny had heard nothing of this, so she did not answer.

"Of course, when your grandmother was alive, it was different," the queen went on. "But now, with the poor archduke so ill, it will be more suitable to have the wedding over there."

Then followed a volley of questions, to which Jenny replied as best she could. Danger certainly gave her courage. In those ways she always showed herself a thoroughbred. She even achieved a fair imitation of the archduchess's manner, which she kept up, to Prince Nicholas's sardonic amusement when they were all three together, with the baroness and General Mortis in attendance.

The queen stayed three days, and went on two long motor trips with them. She constantly urged them to take more exercise.

"You ought to play golf and tennis, you two. Stephanie has quite a drawn look. Because you're in mourning it's no good ruining your health. And I hear she has even given up riding. I call that stupid. The atmosphere of this house is positively archaic."

Nicholas did all the prevaricating, and he did it remarkably well. His aunt, who had not seen him for several years, was evidently very much taken with him.

"He's the sweetest thing," she said to Jenny. "I think you're very lucky, my dear. With people like us it is such a toss up. And he's lucky, too. I must say that. You ought to make a splendid thing out of life. I wonder," she added irrelevantly, "why you make up so much? You're such a lovely girl—it doesn't seem necessary. Didn't your grandmother object?"

"No," said Jenny. She spoke truthfully enough, though it was but a guess on her part. The late empress, in spite of her auto-

cratic nature, had been extraordinarily indulgent to Stephanie, probably because she was the only child of her best beloved son.

The queen went to London for a couple of days, and then came back to Argar Castle for a day and a night before leaving for Galmatla. Nicholas was to follow in about a week's time.

The queen took Jenny into her beautiful tapestried chamber, with the priceless lacquer and gilt furniture, and the old Venetian mirrors and chandelier of the unique golden glass.

"I want a little chat with you," she said. "I've been hearing things about Nicholas in London. There is rather an unpleasant feeling up there. He's been racketing about too much, it seems. Of course, one knows young men do, whatever their station in life, but apparently he's been a little too open about it. You must keep him in order, my dear. I'm not going to ask you whether you're really in love with him. It would be cheek. And you probably wouldn't tell me. But such a lot depends upon you. Any one can see that he's crazy about you."

Jenny started, and looked at the queen in dismay.

"Oh, yes, any woman could see it with both eyes shut," repeated the queen. "But I'm not so sure about you. And that's rather dangerous—for Nicholas."

She changed the subject abruptly.

It chanced that that evening Nicholas and Jenny were alone in the billiard room. The girl showed a natural aptitude for the game, and the prince made a good instructor.

The Queen of Nordland had dined in her own rooms, pleading a headache. Jenny and Nicholas, with the suites in attendance, had got through theirs as quickly as possible. The strain on the principal actors was immense.

Coming out of the billiard room when the game was finished, Nicholas switched off the lights. The great corridor was dimly lighted with candles, and, with one of his irresistible impulses, he put his arms round the girl and kissed her.

"Jenny, my Jenny, how can we go on

playing this game?" he whispered. "You know when I'm hateful to you it's just because I can't bear it."

The girl lay for a moment passive before she realized that everything had changed. The touch of his lips had brought back for an instant the old feeling of incredible happiness.

And just then it happened that the Queen of Nordland came along the corridor and saw them.

Nicholas was equal to that situation, as well as any other. He laughed and drew Jenny's arm through his, and addressed the queen with engaging bonhomie.

"You've caught us billing and cooing, Aunt Adela! Promise you won't tell!"

The next morning the queen told Jenny how glad she was she had surprised that little scene.

"You mustn't mind, my dear. It was so human. Young people should make love. Somehow I was a little afraid about you. But now I'm not at all."

Before she left there was another incident that made things more difficult than ever. It seemed as if this play acting were doomed to publicity.

It was a feast day of the church. A procession of children from the schools and from the household had been organized by the priests to make a circuit of the castle, and the Queen of Nordland asked Nicholas and Jenny to walk down to the entrance gates with her to see it before her car left for the coast to catch the boat. How could they refuse?

It was a beautiful sight, the long line of white clad children with rose wreaths on their hair, holding lighted tapers in their little hands, and singing lustily; and the priests in their robes and the banners and the swinging censers and the great silver cross.

There was a crowd of people on the green opposite the castle gates. Motor cars and bicycles and pony traps were halted.

The queen insisted on crossing the moat and going right out through the massive gates. When the procession had passed, the crowd respectfully saluted the royalties. Then a cinematograph operator appeared and very modestly pleaded to be allowed

to transfer the movements of the royal party to his film.

The queen, in her genial way, gave him instant permission. Nicholas and Jenny were helpless. And so they all three moved about like puppets for his benefit.

The operator went away, beaming, enslaved by her majesty's condescension and charm.

Nicholas was cursing inwardly. And Jenny was wondering hopelessly how it was all going to end.

"I believe in encouraging these people," the queen said. "You young people are so shy. It doesn't cost us anything, and it does them a lot of good." She laughed merrily. "You two looked positively wretched! And Nicholas fiddled with his tie!"

"He always does," said Jenny, feeling that if something did not relieve the tension she would have to shriek.

"I feel such an idiot," the prince admitted, laughing. "I'm not a beautiful girl, like Stephanie," he added wickedly.

She met his eyes. Her head was in a whirl. How could he be so gay, so careless? She was on the verge of hysteria. She could not get used to this position. During the next day or two, all over the country, her face and figure would be flashed on the screen as the Archduchess Stephanie. She had been taken side by side with Nicholas walking through the castle archway; and between Nicholas and the Queen of Nordland, watching the tail end of the procession. In nearly every cinema in the land the audiences would gaze on her, as she had gazed on the real archduchess during the run of the Argar Vale.

The children's shrill, sweet voices in the distance mocked her intolerably, as they walked back through the great stone courtyard to where the queen's car was waiting.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### TERRIBLE TIDINGS.

THERE was no news of Stephanie. The same people were searching for her. Jenny could see that the baroness had lost heart. "What are we to do?" she

exclaimed, wringing her hands. "What are we to do?"

But there was no news forthcoming.

Prince Nicholas had gone to London again for a few days. He was coming back, for form's sake, to take his leave of the archduchess before he returned to Galmatia.

"This will be the end," the baroness said, tears streaming down her face. "It will all have to come out. We shall not be able to keep it a secret."

"Why not?" Jenny tried to console her. "After all, if it has gone too far, when the archduchess comes back, you can give out that she has broken off the engagement."

"But think of the talk, the scandal! People in her station of life don't break off their engagements. And things would be sure to leak out. And how do we know that she will come back?"

"She must," said Jenny. "She must."

But she was by no means convinced. Things certainly looked very dark. The girl's kind heart hied for the poor lady in waiting, who had become an heroic figure in her eyes. Never, it seemed to her, had a woman borne such a heavy burden and got so little thanks.

The prince came back.

They faced each other, he and Jenny, in the little china room of many memories, after dinner. He was leaving by the morning boat.

This was really the end.

"I don't hate you so much for fooling me," the prince said, "as I hate you for throwing me over."

"That is nonsense," said Jenny. She was determined to be brave and calm.

"You ought not to be able to marry another man," he insisted. "I know you are doing it for my sake. I hate you for it, and I adore you for it. But you ought to have waited."

"What for?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered impatiently. "But something might have turned up. As it is, I am going home, and we shall never meet again. You will be the wife of a rich man you don't love. You will wear jewels and eat rich meals and

grow fat. Bah! It makes me sick. It makes me mad."

Jenny looked at him. She tried to make her eyes hard.

"In plain English," she asked, "what could I have been to you?"

"In plain English," he answered angrily, "I don't know. But you needn't have been in such a hurry. You've left me with nothing."

"You can have your 'fun,' she reminded him out of the bitterness of her heart.

"It is very much overrated," he answered grimly.

He came near to her.

"Jenny, this is good-bye!"

She broke down quite suddenly. The strain was too much. She sobbed convulsively as he caught her in his arms.

"Do you love me?" he whispered.

"Don't ask me! Don't ask me! I can't stand any more."

He stroked her hair.

"Poor little girl. It's a shame. They brought you into this. It wasn't your fault. Just because you were good natured and looked like Stephanie. I've been rather a brute to you. Pure selfishness. I wanted you so. But you'll be much better off. It's quite true. I haven't anything to offer you. Good-by, Jenny—good-by!"

They clung together. Outside, in a group of ash trees near the moat, a nightingale was singing, bursting his heart with joy.

The baroness came into the room. She was walking very funnily.

Jenny gave a gasp as she and Nicholas sprang apart; and the prince went to the baroness's assistance.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"The archduchess is dead," said the lady in waiting.

The words fell on the rose scented room like a mysterious, unsubstantial weight. In the ash grove the nightingale went on bursting his little heart with song.

Prince Nicholas dropped the baroness into a chair.

She sat rocking herself to and fro in silent anguish.

"Tell us what you mean, *madame*," said Nicholas impatiently.

"The archduchess is dead," repeated the lady in waiting. "Monsignor Stellaria, her confessor, has just arrived. He looks like death himself. He went in search of her the other day, just as he went before to Constantinople. He has more influence over her in a way than anybody else. She had only got as far as Paris. He found her there—in a poor lodging. She had gone to that dreadful man, as I feared. He had met her in Paris.

"Nobody knew who they were. They were about to move on somewhere else when—when she caught cold, and pneumonia set in, and she died. She had never really got over her illness in Constantinople. When Monsignor Stellaria got to the house, which he discovered through an old servant who was with him and happened on the place by chance, he found that Count Saxt had shot himself on her dead body."

Jenny shuddered. Nicholas stood, pale and obviously moved.

"Monsignor Stellaria managed to quiet the suspicions of the police," the baroness went on. "He described them both as members of her late majesty's household, gave false names, and arranged everything. They are bringing her back here for burial."

"When did it happen?" asked the prince.

"A week ago."

"As long as that!"

"Yes, a week ago. She has been dead a week, and we didn't know."

The poor lady was on the verge of fainting. Nicholas went out to get her some water. When she had revived a little, Jenny helped her to her rooms.

There she clung to the girl, sobbing hysterically.

"Oh, my dear, there is something more dreadful still! The archduchess was demented. She must have been! She wrote to Saxt, telling him that she would commit suicide if he didn't allow her to return to him. Monsignor Stellaria found the letter in the count's pocket. It is a terrible letter. I have taken on myself to burn it. Evidently he told her to meet him in Paris. Oh, but he behaved shamefully! He actually took money from Monsignor Stellaria's agents to desert her. I suppose I oughtn't to speak like this—he is dead, too! Re-

morse came to him in the end. May he find mercy in heaven!" She crossed herself.

Jenny was crying quietly. It was such a pitiful story.

The baroness was a tragic figure. She had given her life in the service of this great family, and she was seeing it crumble to pieces before her eyes—the former empress dead, the archduchess dead, the Archduke Gabriel with his reason gone! Truly the mighty were fallen! And in the frail person of Dora Luini there still lived the passion of loyalty, and in her heart and brain was the determination to uphold their pride and greatness and their unsullied honor before the world.

"Nobody knows," she said when she recovered herself. "Monsignor Stellaria has behaved with genius. The world will never know of her terrible end. She will be brought here and buried quietly, and we can announce her death in a fitting manner. It will be quite easy to understand that we couldn't have a grand funeral with the archduke in this condition."

"Yes," said Jenny. "I am glad that the world will not have to know."

So the hour of her freedom had struck. Which was also the hour of her bondage. For Nicholas would go home, and another bride would be found for him. And she must keep her word and marry Marcus Phare.

Some one knocked at the door. It proved to be General Mortis.

"His royal highness requests that you and Miss Devon will come at once to the library," he said to the baroness. "He is there with Monsignor Stellaria. They have something of great importance to say to you."

The two women went down.

Nicholas was standing with his back to the fireplace. Monsignor Stellaria, a middle-aged man, of frail and ascetic appearance, sat in an armchair. His cheeks were like snow, and his thin hands lay like old ivory on his black cassock with the touch of wine red about the collar.

He wore a skull cap on his head, and scanty iron gray hair escaped from under it.

Nicholas asked the ladies to be seated.

"Have you thought about this complication?" he asked. "I wish to warn you at once that we shall have to be very careful. The archduchess was dead two days before my Aunt Adela left the castle. My aunt will tell my mother all about her. She was dead on the day when my aunt, Miss Devon and I went to watch the procession. That night in London we three were shown on the screen at the picture houses. The archduchess was already dead."

The baroness gave a cry of horror and covered her face with her hands. Jenny looked vaguely from one to the other, murmuring:

"I don't understand."

The prince looked at the monsignor.

"Will your reverence explain?" he asked.

The priest inclined his head, and addressed the baroness in a voice full of gentle music.

"Our first consideration must be to safeguard the archduchess's honor," he began. "I am sure we are all agreed about that. As his royal highness has explained, the archduchess was actually dead at the time his aunt, the Queen of Nordland, was here, and when the features of this young lady were flashed on the screen of the cinemas as representing her imperial highness. This places us in a most delicate position. It means that we can never make public the real date of the archduchess's death without confessing that we had provided a substitute when she ran away with Count Saxt."

Dead silence greeted this obvious truth.

"It is not only ourselves and his royal highness who are involved, but also the dead—the memory of her late imperial majesty, and by inference the honor of His Imperial Highness the Archduke," went on the suave voice. "To allow this story to reach the public ear would do irreparable harm, inestimable damage."

"What can we do?" asked the baroness despairingly. "What is the good of keeping it up? His royal highness cannot marry Miss Devon."

"I suggest that we gain time," said the priest. "I am a little afraid of the relations of Count Saxt. They may cause trouble. I wish to deal with them myself."

Let us try to see this matter from some other standpoints—for instance, from that of the Queen of Nordland. It would be an unnecessary shock to give her majesty—that the young lady she saw so blooming and happy here should have died within a day or so of her departure. It would be asked why we did not cancel the film, which I understand is still being shown. We should find it very difficult to answer these questions—very difficult indeed.”

“Tell your plans, monsignor,” suggested Nicholas.

He looked grave. And no wonder. Here was a situation which, unless handled with all skill, might cause the moral collapse not only of his own family, but of that of Rosemark.

“I suggest that his royal highness should go home to-morrow, as was intended,” said the priest. “I suggest that Miss Devon should be good enough to stay on here for another few days—perhaps a week, perhaps more. We can then, in due course, announce the peaceful death of the archduchess and hold a quiet funeral service. And Miss Devon can then be free once more to live her own life, followed by our undying gratitude and fervent blessings.”

“Count Saxt’s people?” queried Nicholas shortly.

“Your royal highness, I think I can deal with them,” replied Monsignor Stellaria, who was showing himself undoubtedly as much a diplomat as a churchman. “What we need above all things is a few days in which to adjust ourselves—to be quite sure that we have left no loose ends, that the Paris police were absolutely satisfied.”

Nicholas looked at Jenny.

“What do you say, Miss Devon?” he asked formally.

The girl answered in confusion:

“I cannot stay long—really I cannot. And, as the baroness says, what good would it do?”

“A fortnight at the most,” replied the soothing voice of the priest. “I guarantee that we shall have disposed of this most sad difficulty by then.”

“Very well,” Jenny said despondently. She reckoned that would still give her a day or two before Marcus Phare came back.

There seemed to be no end to it. Deceit followed on deceit, lie on lie, linked in an endless chain.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### CONFESSION.

SO it was arranged. Jenny found herself transferred to Monsignor Stellaria for instruction. It appeared that he had to proceed on the continent at once to get into touch with the relatives of Count Saxt.

The archduchess’s plain coffin arrived on the following night and was laid secretly in the family vault. Only six people knew the truth.

All that was wanted of Jenny was to stay in the castle in case any urgent occasion should arise for the archduchess to be seen. The priest did not anticipate it, but always one had to be prepared. He implored her to behave as she had always done. He relied absolutely on her and on the baroness.

Jenny did not see Prince Nicholas again before he left. He sent her a note, worded in terms of grave tenderness. It was no time to speak of love, she knew, and yet it chilled her. For the first time she seemed to feel that he was resigned to lose her. No doubt this terrible tragedy had made him see things in a different light.

Monsignor Stellaria left the day after the prince.

That morning the baroness collapsed and had to take to her bed.

Jenny was left to her own devices. General Mortis and the Countess Griech were in attendance on her. The general was elderly and kind, but too perturbed to carry on ordinary conversation; and the countess was a very timid little old lady, who treated the girl as if she were afraid of her.

So she was entirely alone.

She visited the baroness in her rooms after lunch. Then a message was brought that the archduke wanted to see her. She found him quite childish, and very much aged and withered. There were two attendants with him.

He smiled vacantly at her and stroked



her hair, and led her to his big table with the war maps on it; and he began to throw the toy soldiers on to the floor, and she picked them up for him.

It was a saddening experience. The great house was like a tomb.

She decided to go for a walk. The park was very vast. She followed one of the wide grass rides that stretched as far as the eye could see, and found herself in the woods. Then she walked right round the inner walls, and came back through the formal gardens and the wonderful rose gardens and the huge clipped yew walks to the stone courtyard.

At the entrance doors of the castle she saw a motor car drawn up. She went on, not daring to turn back lest she had been observed. As she reached the steps, a stout lady was getting out of the car. She was fair and rather florid. She was dressed in dark travelling clothes.

Another lady descended behind her.

There were several servants grouped behind General Mortis, who was awaiting the lady. He went forward to meet her and bowed very low over her hand.

Jenny heard him say, "Your majesty."

She did not know what to do. This was evidently another queen. No royal personage had been expected. The old soldier looked perturbed.

Jenny sent him a despairing glance.

Just then the stout lady turned and caught sight of her. General Mortis muttered something almost unintelligible.

Jenny mechanically made a curtsy; and the next thing she knew was that she was clasped to the stout lady's breast, and a jolly voice that exactly suited the pleasant, rather homely face was exclaiming:

"Oh, this, of course, is Stephanie! My dear, I knew you at once from your photograph! But you are even prettier than I thought possible! Lucky Nicholas! And isn't it a shame that I have missed my boy. I heard that he left only yesterday. We must have crossed each other somewhere—I expect in Paris."

Jenny wanted to sink through the earth, as she realized that this was Nicholas's mother.

"Yes, my sister Adela gave such a glow-

ing account of you," the queen went on. "And I had to come to Paris on an unexpected visit to a very old and dear friend, who is lying ill. So I couldn't resist the temptation of having a peep at my future little daughter, and I rather hoped my boy would still be here to take me back. But never mind! You'll put me up for the night, and we can have a cozy chat together about Nicholas."

Jenny did not know how the next few moments passed. It seemed an eternity before she could bring herself to speak, but, as a matter of fact, very little was required of her. The Queen of Galmatia was a most voluble lady, and her kind heart, shining in her kind face, proclaimed the fact that she found Jenny everything that was to be desired.

Between them, Jenny and General Mortis explained the position—that the archduke was not in a state to receive her majesty; that they hoped she would forgive them for not being prepared for her visit and would overlook any shortcomings.

But the queen was not difficult to please. While the state rooms were hastily prepared, she devoured her tea with a great appetite, and she hoped they would dine quite *en famille* and not make any fuss about her at all.

Her lady-in-waiting was a good-looking, placid young woman, who sat smiling and saying very little. Many words were probably never required of her.

The queen was conducted to her rooms by Jenny. The girl would have left her, but she was not allowed to.

"Just go into that beautiful room next door," said her majesty, "and wait for me while I wash my hands and slip into another gown, and then we'll have a talk."

Jenny was obliged to comply with this request, which was virtually a command.

She stood like a statue by one of the great latticed windows while she waited, looking over the formal terraced gardens with their carpets of brilliant flowers. They were chiefly red and orange flowers, and reminded her of fire and blood.

The queen came in. She looked much younger without her hat, rather like a lumpy, overgrown, fair-haired girl.

She came up to Jenny and gave her another affectionate hug.

"Just to see you is to love you," she said.

Then something snapped in Jenny's head. Everything she had been told went out of her mind. She forgot convention and expediency; she forgot the archduchess's honor and the empress's memory and Nicholas's pride. She only knew that this could not go on.

She could not and would not deceive Nicholas's mother.

She fell on her knees and began to sob out her story.

The queen stared at her blankly.

"I am not the Archduchess Stephanie," said Jenny, brokenly. "I am Jenny Devou—I was a manikin. The archduchess ran away, and they made me come here to take her place. They say I am exactly like her. And now she is dead. And you are Nicholas's mother, and I can't—I can't lie to you!"

"This can't be true!" cried the amazed lady. "My poor child, you must be mad!"

"It is true—indeed, it is true!"

The queen bent and pulled Jenny to her feet.

"You must begin again, if you are sure you are telling me the truth."

Jenny gave a cry as the door opened and Prince Nicholas came in in traveling clothes, his cap in his hand.

He looked from one to the other, then said quietly:

"So the cat's out of the bag!"

Jenny went on sobbing. She could not control herself. The prince came over and took her hand.

"You have told my mother the truth," he said. "Why did you do that?"

"I could not do anything else," she answered, suddenly calm. "I could not lie to your mother."

"How did you get here, my boy?" the queen asked. "Oh, but I am glad you have come! My head is whirling. This story is too fantastic for me to grasp."

"I heard this morning in Paris that you had passed through," he answered. "So I went to the British Embassy, and they kindly wired for a gunboat to take me over the water. I was afraid of this as soon as I heard that you were in this country. It is a pity you had to know, mother mine. I am sorry. Our deception was almost over. We were all going back to our own lives." He gave a sad little smile. "But you must not blame Jenny. I can't allow that."

"I can't understand," cried the queen. "I haven't taken it in."

Jenny had undoubtedly been incoherent. Nicholas now told the story in simple, direct words.

His mother listened in silence, and her face grew grave.

"Since you have forgiven the deception, Nicholas," she said, when he had finished, "there's nothing for me to say. But how do you expect to get out of this fearful muddle? Of course, nothing must leak out. It would be a frightful scandal. We should all suffer—the innocent as well as the guilty. It would do more harm than good."

It was the same spirit that they all displayed, thought Jenny, though now without bitterness. They stood together. The honor of one royal house was the honor of all the others.

"And it would not bring the poor girl back to life," concluded the queen.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



## IF I DREAM YOU

LIFE, they say, is a little sleep.

Perhaps it's true;

Well, I shan't mind, if in the sleep

I may dream you!

Mary Carolyn Davies.



# Bondage

By JOHN SCARRY

**J**OHN FERGUSON was to leave Surabaya. Only that morning the Pennsylvania Oil Company had ordered him to Singapore, there to be assistant general manager of the Malayan Territory.

The first one to know about his good fortune was Mary Campbell. Mary was the daughter of old Jock Campbell, director in Surabaya of the Straits & Java Bank. To-day, after office hours, Ferguson had picked her up at her home and whisked her out to Goonoong Sari for a round of golf.

The evening was incomparable. By the time the sun's rays were slanting from beyond tall tamarinds to the west the man and girl had finished nine holes. They were now refreshing themselves with ginger beer on the clubhouse veranda.

There was something delightful about Mary Campbell. She was not beautiful, perhaps, but Ferguson had come to see more than beauty in her wholesome good looks. Glowing with perfect health, in sweater and tweed skirt, golfing brogues and thick wool

stockings, she was like a breath of the good wind that sweeps across Scotch heather.

Needless to say, Ferguson had long since fallen in love with her.

He had never confessed his love, however, and as a man of honor he was sure in his mind he never would. Nevertheless, his voice held a strange eagerness.

Mary Campbell listened breathlessly; a soft cry of genuine gladness leaped to her lips. Coloring swiftly she offered her hand across the scarred teak table. For a moment her fingers rested firmly in Ferguson's. Firmly—and the contact ran through the man like an electric shock.

Nothing extraordinary in that, to be sure. Things had been that way with Ferguson these many months. But suddenly, miraculously, it was as though he now had vision to see deep below the surface, to observe the true feeling that lay behind the girl's congratulations.

What he discovered was overwhelming.

Mary Campbell returned his love! Her interest paralleled his own.

Ferguson knew he was not mistaken. True, other than that first mounting flush, she gave no outward sign; there was certainly nothing more than comradely rejoicing in her regard. Yet the man *knew*. He was convinced as he was of anything in this world that he need only step around the table and he could take his love into his arms.

But he made no move.

And presently, as he walked beside the girl down to where his chauffeur was waiting with the car, Ferguson's brain was in a painful tumult, torn by conflict. He thrilled in every fiber with the wonder of his knowledge; and he struggled desperately against the happiness that possessed him. For, chiding him with the truth of its protest, was an inward voice arguing that the situation was unspeakably tragic.

## II.

NINE years previously, when he was twenty-one, Ferguson had come out to Java. A raw, bewildered youth at the time, more than a little terrified at the prospect of working for Yankees. An uncle, employed in Calcutta by the Pennsylvania Oil Company, had got the young fellow his chance.

Following a Surabaya custom of those days—and of to-day for that matter—two men from the office came down to meet their new colleague at the dock. The two men were Americans, self-confident, friendly. They had not been very long in the country, but they knew the business of welcoming. First, with speed to the Oranje Hotel to hustle Ferguson into clean white drill; and half an hour later found all three of them moored to the marble of the Sim-pang Bar.

Ferguson was a Scotchman, but never before that night had he seen Scotch whisky handled so recklessly.

In the morning the two Americans, fresh as though nothing had happened, breezed into the hotel again to rouse Ferguson out of bed. Ferguson gazed at them mournfully; felt moved to announce the unswerving probity of his future conduct. But the Americans only laughed at his headache

and scoffed at his remorse. Still laughing, they escorted the sufferer downtown to the office.

Charlie Wells, popularly known throughout the Far East as the Bald-headed Eagle, was then Surabaya manager for the Pennsylvania; and despite the dullness of Ferguson's morning head, the young Scot could see how well the nickname fitted. Charlie Wells had the keen look of an eagle.

"You'll do two years here in the office," said he, coming to business without great delay; "at least two years. Make it less if you can. Depends on how quickly you can learn the language."

"Malay, sir," ventured Ferguson hopefully. He was bent on making a good first impression.

Charlie Wells snorted.

"Hell, no! You'll learn *that*, or starve. Malay's a cinch. You'll pick it up from your boy in three months' time. But Dutch is a different proposition. I can't send you travelling until you're pretty good at it. You'll need it. Of course the Dutchmen you'll meet at the club can all speak English, but in business you'll run into plenty who can't. Half-castes, most of 'em; you'll insult 'em if you spring Malay. So Dutch is the thing; and you'll need a teacher."

The Bald-headed Eagle swung around in his chair.

"Miss van der Bent!"

A girl, of whom Ferguson had been vaguely aware, turned from a row of steel letter-files across the office.

The young fellow watched her approach. She was such a girl as he never before had seen. Brown skinned; so she must be a native, a Javanese, he thought. But she was dressed in European clothes—and her name was van der Bent. Could she be Dutch—with that coloring, and those queer eyes?

Then he remembered. Why, of course! Here was one of those half-castes Mr. Wells had mentioned. Odd looking—good looking, the boy decided.

Good looking hardly described her. Just then, perhaps, Jacqueline van der Bent was not the dazzling creature she was later to become. Hers was not the beauty to show

to best advantage in simple office garb, But the beauty was there—in ambush.

She was tall, slender, and her young body was full-ripe, with an indolent, supple gracefulness which called up visions of sensuous native dances. She had long, thick, wavy black hair, limpid dark eyes that slanted alluringly toward her straight nose; she had tiny sensitive hands and small feet.

And her skin was not brown; far from it. Ferguson was afterward to look upon it as the color of pale gold, of mellowed ivory, the color which replaces in the Orient the lily-white of western poetry.

Now, however, he only stared in some curiosity; and Mr. Wells spoke to the girl in English.

"Who teaches Dutch around here, Miss van der Bent? Whom do we always get?"

"Why, I could not say," she answered. "We have not had the occasion to employ a Dutch teacher since I am here. Mr. Conant and Mr. Parry have learned a little Dutch already—in Semarang. And Mr. Hagenberg, of course, is a Hollander."

Jove! She spoke English well—with a hint of twisty accent that was strangely entrancing. Must be a half-caste of the better sort.

"H'm, that's right, too," Mr. Wells was saying. "Well, look it up, will you? You can find out from some of those old vouchers in the storeroom. Try two years ago. Mr. Ferguson here's got to have a Dutch teacher."

Of a sudden Ferguson actually felt the girl's regard. It might have been cool, impersonal, so far as she was concerned; but the survey of those dark eyes had the instant effect of fire in the boy's blood. Then Jacqueline van der Bent flashed a brief smile toward the Bald-headed Eagle.

"If you are willing, sir, and if Mr. Fairguson is willing, I would teach Mr. Fairguson Dutch. I have time to spare, after office, and I have done teaching."

Charlie Wells looked interested. And he probably knew no reason why his subordinate should be unwilling—which, indeed, Ferguson was not.

"Why, that's fine, Miss van der Bent; that's just the thing. All right; you'll look out for Mr. Ferguson. The company pays,

of course. Go along with her, Ferguson, and fix it up. And remember, I'll be getting reports on how you study."

Ferguson went along. If Mr. Wells had suggested that he go find a raging orangutan and learn monkey-talk from the beast, he would have gone just the same.

### III.

THAT was how it began. The rest is an old story—in the East. In America, very likely, a book of many chapters would hardly suffice to bring about understanding.

In that book there would have to be a chapter describing the effect on Ferguson of perfumed Javanese nights, of palm trees glistening in white moonlight, of exotic sounds and songs filtering into the bare room where the boy sat studying. For he held to his vow to shun the Simpang Bar.

There would have to be a chapter setting forth the deliberate intent of a girl who was centuries wiser than any twenty-one year old Scotchman, a girl whose whole traditional ambition was a white husband.

And there would have to be a chapter on lonesomeness. Especially a chapter on lonesomeness.

A lonesome land, Java. Its lonesomeness for Ferguson was inescapable, throttling him like the Old Man of the Sea, even on the rare occasions when he found himself in crowds. He was twenty-one, and his home life had been sheltered, loving, a trifle strait-laced. He needed a little sympathy, a little beauty of thought, a little innocent excitement perhaps, and the companionship of warm-hearted humanity.

He encountered everywhere, instead, the callousness that is all the East.

He married Jacqueline van der Bent after he had known her six months. It was easy for Jacqueline. She wanted a white husband, and here was one at hand. Six months of Dutch lessons; six months of dainty half-oriental tenderness, of sparkling white-toothed laughter, and of a warm pulsing body leaning close to Ferguson's as she made corrections on his paper.

He struggled against it, to be sure, but he struggled blindly, not knowing the strength of his adversary; and he struggled

in solitude. In the end he would have gone through hell's fire for touch of Jacqueline's hand.

Still, because the Pennsylvania Oil Company forbade its young men to take wives before they had completed their first three years in the East, he married her secretly. Jacqueline did not care. She could afford to wait for social prestige. Giving up her position at the office, she settled down with Ferguson to simple housekeeping in a small secluded villa.

No one ever found out about her. So far as the English-speaking colony knew, Ferguson lived alone. His fellows, failing a dozen times to drag him again to their festivities, finally put him down as a queer bird.

They let it go at that.

And the boy was deliriously happy. Jacqueline, along with her compelling beauty, was lighthearted as a child. To the lonely and reserved young fellow she became a source of never-ending joy. It never occurred to him that she was now, for the first time in her life, having leisure to find her true self.

Naturally, living as he did, Ferguson learned Dutch with considerable rapidity. Fourteen months after his arrival in Surabaya he was pronounced ready for the road. The Bald-headed Eagle praised him outspokenly.

"You're as good as an American, John! Never believed you Englishmen had it in you."

"Englishmen!" Ferguson retorted hotly. "Read your atlas, man. I'm from Dundee."

Charlie Wells laughed.

"And you're going to Celebes and Borneo!"

Celebes and Borneo. On the map the islands of the Eastern Indies lie pretty well bunched; but only on the map. Actually, it takes longer to go from Surabaya to Menado than from New York to Honolulu. Ferguson found some of his outlying markets a full five weeks' journey away from headquarters.

But he had to go; and he had to go alone. His salary would not permit Jacqueline to accompany him. Nor did he dare to take her.

Not that there was any reason why he should hesitate about leaving her behind. Her love, he knew full well, was every bit as steadfast as his own! Six months at the most; he would be working his head off—for Jacqueline. And Jacqueline would be counting the days until he returned.

So he went away. Celebes and Borneo. Long sweltering days on greasy tropical rivers, fever-ridden nights in mountain towns, pleadings and arguments with apathetic Chinese agents, weeks of waiting for tardy steamers. And if, in Samarinda, or Toli Toli, or Gorontalo, Ferguson ran into cynical Americans and Britishers who spoke scornfully of half-castes, swore to their inconstancy, he simply laughed to himself and knew such men to be fools.

After ten months he returned to Surabaya. Jacqueline was nowhere to be found.

Ferguson heard of her three times before he saw her again, although each time he raced after her in horrified, dazed incredulity. She was seen in Malang with a rich Armenian, in Semarang with a Dutch sugar planter, and in Tosari with Stapleton of Stapleton & Moore, whose wife was visiting her parents in San Francisco. But always as Jacqueline van der Bent. Ferguson's name was never involved.

He heard of her only by chance, casually; and each time he raced after her, hot thoughts of murder rioting in his brain. But he never caught up with her; and gradually his fury died. Jacqueline's defection was too gross. He could not commit murder—for such as she.

Stricken to the soul, when at last he saw her in Surabaya, he tried only to dodge a meeting.

Jacqueline saw him, however, and came to him. Came to him in lighted foyer of the Royal Bioscope, where her treacherous beauty shone full upon him. But he did not see it. The moment was so unreal, so unworldly, that he questioned his own existence. Absolute abstraction held him.

Jacqueline spoke to him, and was gone; and after a long time he remembered promising to call on her the following afternoon at the Oranje Hotel.

He went there at tea-time. Jacqueline was alone, waiting for him. The only diff-

erence was in the clothes she now possessed; but they were enough to transform her completely. Dazzling, dazzling—God, she was beautiful!

She was very frank about the situation, frank and matter-of-fact. She was sorry—"sorry like hell, John Fairguson!" She had thought she wanted a husband, but those months alone had taught her differently. She wanted wealth, jewels, luxury, fine clothes. Very certainly, she did not want a *poor* husband.

"But you've got me," was his dull reply.

She flashed a startled glance from her narrow eyes. "You would not have me come back!"

"No," he said; "no, not that."

"Then you must divorce me. Be sure I shall do nothing to prevent." She leaned forward with a touch of the tenderness he knew so well. "Do that, John Fairguson, and put me out of your mind—altogether. I am worth nothing else."

Put her out of his mind! That was easy. He had already put her out of his mind as completely as he would forget a snake slain on his threshold and tossed out for the boys to bury. But divorce—

The company would probably overlook his infraction of the rule now that the affair was ended. Nothing to fear from that quarter. A divorce, however, Ferguson knew, could never be managed with anything like the secrecy that had attended their marriage. His mind shrank from the prospect of publicity. The considerations which had held his hand from revenge now filled him with abhorrence at the thought of court proceedings. The situation was too vile. He could never lend his name to such a thing.

"No," he said bitterly; "count me out. Do as you please in the future. You'll never see me again."

And the next day war blazed out all over Europe.

#### IV.

FERGUSON took the first ship home from Surabaya. For four years he did his reckless best to have his head shot off. But in November, 1918, he could boast a trunkful of decorations and not a single scar.

Demobilized, he still had to live. A good position offered in London, and he took it. He had held it about three weeks, when he began to realize that he was torturing himself. Every time he looked upon some straightforward English girl the knowledge of what he had thrown away stabbed like a knife into his vitals.

Only one thing to do, then. If his tale was told, if he had lived his life before he was twenty-eight, he must go back where the fact would not be so constantly thrust before his eyes. Nearness to Jacqueline, he argued, would never again have power to hurt him. He cabled New York, and the Pennsylvania Oil Company received him with open arms.

In Singapore, two months later, he ran into the Bald-headed Eagle. That individual, recently elevated to assistant general manager, accomplished Ferguson's appointment to the managership at Surabaya. And now at last, after two more years, the Bald-headed Eagle had become general manager, and had cabled for Ferguson to come to Singapore as his right-hand man.

During the two years he had spent in Surabaya since the war, Ferguson had never once seen Jacqueline. Not that his wife was not everywhere to be seen; her fame was great in the land. Her beauty, her conquests, were subjects of conversation wherever men gathered by themselves.

For that reason Ferguson had always steered clear of such places.

His position as manager of the Pennsylvania, however, had demanded that he not live in seclusion. He had got out among people, among the solidier members of the English-speaking community. And gradually, the hopelessness that London had inspired had drained away.

He had drifted naturally, inevitably, it would seem, into comradeship with Mary Campbell. Mary was the only unmarried British girl in Surabaya; and Ferguson was about the only one of the younger men who did not worship exclusively at the Simpang Bar. So they had come to be often together; riding in the gray mornings along the misty banks of the irrigation canal, trouncing each other at golf or tennis in the afternoons.

And now—this!

Mary Campbell loved him. The conception shattered all his resolution. So long as he had remained unaware of her affection, it had been possible for him to contemplate renunciation with a degree of fortitude. He loved her, and was happy to do so; but he had no right to love her. So he would simply say nothing about it, and go his way. The only honorable course.

Although he approached it, considered it, from every angle, he constantly rejected all thought of divorce. True, he had much more money now than he had had seven years before when tragedy had burst upon his head. Perhaps a divorce could be managed with a fair amount of secrecy. But a fair amount would not be enough. Secrecy would have to be absolute.

Not for his sake; not because he would save himself from the ensuing scandal. His love, he knew, could bear any burden, any sacrifice.

But that was not the whole of it. The fact must ever remain that he had had a notorious woman as his wife—a woman who was still notorious, and known to the farthest end of the China Coast. He could free himself from her—easily; but afterward, could he ask any such girl as Mary Campbell to marry him?

The idea was monstrous. He could never do it. No; divorce or not divorced, his marriage to Jacqueline van der Bent must forever put him outside of all hope of Mary Campbell.

To-day's discovery, however, now completely possessed him. Loving the girl with all his heart, his love surged in an uncontrollable flood as he realized it found favor.

When the first confusion of the situation subsided, and they were whirling back along the river-road to Surabaya, it became more and more imperative in Ferguson's mind that something be done.

Mary Campbell, after a long interval of silence—a silence that to Ferguson was strained and unnatural—began chatting about things that had nothing to do with his going away. She did not thus deceive him. Indeed, her very avoidance of what

must be the dominant topic warned him that she was troubled, wondering—waiting, perhaps.

He felt an utter cad as he dropped her at home and ordered the chauffeur to drive him to his own house.

## V.

FERGUSON lived on Sumatra Street. The garden behind his bungalow sloped down to the Kalimas, the Golden River. After a late dinner he dragged a big Makassar chair to the railing of his rear veranda, and sat down deliberately to think it over.

Hours of thinking got him nowhere. Divorce was out of the question; and there was no other loophole. He was imprisoned, walled up as effectually as by brick and plaster, through the folly of his youth. Unless Jacqueline died—a remote possibility—and their secret died with her—

Unless Jacqueline died—

The lights were going out one by one in the houses along the Kalimas. It was getting late. The moon had already dropped below the level of Goobeng Bridge, and now hung crisscrossed by the bridge's steel supports. A stillness gripped everything, the utter absence of sound that lies on a sleeping village. But Ferguson was aware of none of these things. Fascinated, cold, his mind was traveling a fearsome path.

Unless Jacqueline died! Why not! God, it would only be fair! He wanted to be free—free!

But at last he laughed harshly.

"Lord, no!" he muttered. "I can't do that!"

His face was haggard in the last light of the moon. He stood up wearily to go into the house; and as he did so a motor-car shot around the corner beside him. It left the driveway; came to a stop behind the row of *melati* bushes which screened his back compound from the street.

Ferguson went slowly toward the steps. He stood there, feeling a mild curiosity as to the identity of this midnight visitor. Vaguely, then, he saw the outline of a woman's form coming across the grass.



"John Fairguson!"

Ferguson's immediate sensation was one of fright, of sheer terror. He felt cold along his spine; and the back of his head prickled as though each hair were standing out straight. Jacqueline! And only a moment before he had been contemplating how best he could murder her!

"John Fairguson!"

"Yes," hoarsely.

"I want to talk with you. So I drove around back because everybody knows my car."

"Very thoughtful of you," he managed to say.

Jacqueline laughed. "Oh, for my sake too."

They stood facing each other in the darkness. A wave of her perfume swept to the man's senses, mingling with the choking breath of night-blooming *melati*. But Ferguson's only thought, recurring white-hot, was that here was his chance. His chance to be free!

"I want to talk with you."

"Come inside," he said shortly.

He preceded Jacqueline into his study; switched on one light in his table lamp. Then, steadily, he looked up at her across his desk.

She was as he had seen her that afternoon in the Oranje Hotel: the never-changing superhness of her beauty struck him with the force of a blow. Hard, glittering beauty, of course, and sensual; but it was fresh at the same time. Ferguson looked in vain for a hint of evil cunning in her eyes.

At a glance Ferguson noticed that the shutter was closed on the only window in the room. He walked back and closed the door; after which he motioned Jacqueline to a big leather chair. Then he sat down at his desk.

"What do you want?"

"Well—I want you to divorce me, John Fairguson."

Ferguson only stared.

"I will explain," she went on, meeting his eyes direct and smiling a little: "I want to marry."

"Oh, you want to marry." The man nodded, and nodded. "I see. You want

to marry, so you came to me to divorce you—just like that."

"Of course."

Followed a full minute of silence. She wanted a divorce, the final, unequivocal step that would put Mary Campbell out of Ferguson's reach. His eyes narrowed; a strange, harsh laugh sprang unhidden to his lips.

There was an automatic pistol, he knew, in the drawer at his right hand. The room was tightly closed, and there were no houses within seventy-five yards. No one would hear a single shot—or investigate it if they did hear. This was not London. A Japanese policeman would be likely to slink away from any disturbance in a white man's house.

She wanted a divorce; and one swift movement, only one crook of the finger—But to shoot a woman!—dead—like that. To shoot any one in cold blood!

"You will do it, John Fairguson?"

"And have the whole Far East laughing at me?"

"Pooh! For a month. Then it is forgotten. If you had done it seven years ago, no one would ever think of it now. But now you must do it."

"Must!" He was temporizing, and he knew it. Still, all the time, a few cells in the back of his brain kept rehearsing the simple motions that would open his path to freedom.

"Why, yes," Jacqueline answered with a little pout. "I want to marry. You are a good fellow, and will help me. We shall make it very secret."

"We can't make it secret. People will find out."

"Here in Surabaya, yes. But I shall keep it from the man I am to marry. He is very stupid. And directly we are divorced, I shall go with him to Europe—to France."

A red mist of anger swam suddenly into Ferguson's vision. As easy as that! She cared for nothing, for nobody. So long as she came safely out of their predicament, it bothered her not at all to leave shame and anguish as his portion. The very heartlessness of her scheme made the man's blood boil.

"Suppose I refuse to divorce you?" he asked sharply.

Jacqueline's eyes opened wide, giving an impression of hurt surprise.

"Then you spoil my opportunity! You will not do that!"

Oh, I should be very angry. I should tell everything about us, John Fairguson. I should tell everything."

That was enough; that decided him. Very slowly, softly, Ferguson pulled open the drawer that held his pistol. Another second and the fingers of his right hand curled around the weapon's grip.

With his eyes never leaving Jacqueline's dark ones, it seemed to him that he could sense a stiffening through the woman's frame—as though in preparation for a sudden action, for flight if need be. But more than anything else that stiffening made him consider the irremediable rigor that would come when his bullet had accomplished its mission.

And in that tense appalling second a saving reflection suddenly entered Ferguson's mind.

An incredible weakness seized his elbows and wrists.

What a fool he was! Murder!—and his hand, releasing the pistol as though it were red-hot, trembled so that he shut the drawer with a slam. No, God no! He would never go to Mary Campbell with the stain of blood on his conscience.

He was beaten. He must bow to the inevitable. Whichever way he turned, Mary Campbell was lost to him; whichever way he turned!

His heart knew the burden of utter despair; and he now wanted nothing more than to get Jacqueline out of the house, to rid himself as quickly as possible of her presence. The scent of her perfume stuck in his nostrils as something contaminating.

"All right," he said flatly; and he sat up straight in his chair. "I'll start it to-morrow. Give me your address, and the lawyer can let you know how it's coming along."

Jacqueline smiled triumphantly as she handed a card across the desk—with her left hand.

"You would not have succeeded, John Fairguson."

Ferguson looked at the woman, not understanding. Jacqueline lifted her right hand from beside the big chair in which she was sitting. Poised on her fingers, glittering viciously in the dim light, quivered a long, slender dagger.

"I never miss, John Fairguson," she lightly remarked. "My aim is sure. In the heart, in the throat—anywhere. And so quick! Before you could raise a pistol from your desk."

Ferguson understood, and shrugged.

"Oh, yes. Yes; I have no doubt. Only go away now. After this the lawyer will attend to everything."

"You do not ask whom I am to marry?"

"No; I'm not interested."

"He is a half-caste—like me."

"And you love him, of course?" a trifle grimly.

A sneer curled the woman's full red lips.

"Bah! I hate him! He loves me—the fool! And, oh, I have told him such lies! He is very rich."

"H'm!"

The fool! Yes, she could make a fool out of any man. But it lay in his power to clip her wings. Would he do it? Let Jacqueline do her worst; let the crash come openly; save this other chap from such a disillusionment as he himself had known. It was on Ferguson's lips to voice his thoughts when the door suddenly opened from the veranda.

A man came in, shut the door behind him. He was about Ferguson's age, handsome, dark-skinned, with a small black mustache. The light from the lamp shone full on his face confusing him as he looked from one to the other of the occupants of the room. There was a savage glitter in his eyes; his breath came fast.

"Dolph!"

Jacqueline's shriek filled the four walls; and Ferguson sprang to his feet. Here was unquestionably Jacqueline's intended victim.

For a full thirty seconds no one moved.

"So!" said the intruder at last, heavily, in Dutch. "Fortunately, I saw your car—and followed."

"And now you can follow your nose out of here!" Ferguson rapped out hotly. He felt a certain sympathy for the half-caste, but it had to give way to swift indignation at this unwarranted entry into his house. An absurd melodrama; out of the corner of his eye he could see Jacqueline stiffen as she had done before.

Certainty of her guilt was plain on the man, Dolph's, face. He gave Ferguson not one second of attention. Spitting a vile name at the woman, he reached swiftly for his hip pocket.

What followed occurred with a speed that left Ferguson gasping. The next thing he knew a flicker of light passed across the room in front of him.

The half-caste rocked backward. A tall corner bookcase kept him from falling. He made no outcry; the only noise was the clash of broken glass around his feet. Ferguson knew that the man had driven his shoulder through a pane of the bookcase door. Then a spreading circle of blood leaped out on the breast of Dolph's linen coat.

Against that dark spot gleamed the silver of Jacqueline's dagger-grip. Every inch of the long blade was buried in the half-caste's body. With his left hand he plucked feebly, abstractedly, at the deadly weapon.

"He would have shot me, John Fairguson!" came in frantic tones from the woman. "You saw that, John Fairguson!" Jacqueline sprang hastily from the chair.

Ferguson had started toward the wounded man.

But before he could take two steps a snarl burst from Dolph's lips. Cursing Jacqueline with his last breath, the half-caste thrust forth his right hand. The thunder of an explosion resounded in the closed room.

Jacqueline dropped as though struck by lightning; and the half-caste, smiling, slid down the bookcase to the floor.

Sheer horror wrung an exclamation from Ferguson. He knelt beside Jacqueline; turned her over. His fingers tore at the silk of her gown; blood from a bullet wound over her heart clung warmly to his hand. She was dead beyond any doubt; and Dolph was dead. A weakness attacked the

survivor. He groped his way backward into the chair Jacqueline had occupied.

For a long time he did not move.

At the end of half an hour no one had come to make inquiries. No one would come.

Jacqueline was dead—and their secret had died with her. Ferguson was free. He was shocked, too, and stunned; but during that long half hour of waiting no process of reasoning had convinced him that he would do any one any good by revealing his part in the affair.

With quiet determination, therefore, he set to work. It was a gruesome task, but there was no way he could escape it. Lifting the two bodies, one at a time, he carried them to Jacqueline's motor-car. Then he drove the car two miles out along the river-road toward Goonoong Sari, and left it.

Two hours later he had cleaned up the last signs of the night's occurrences from himself and his house and compound. He went to bed.

For three days after that he waited. The double tragedy was just about a three day's wonder. The police, after scurrying about aimlessly, fruitlessly, put the two deaths down to a fatal quarrel between the principals. There was never a word of suspicion that the quarrel had not taken place where the bodies were found.

Ferguson breathed easier.

On the day before he was to go away from Surabaya, he went to Mary Campbell. She met him on her veranda; and in that moment he knew he must forever love even the ground on which she walked.

"I've come to tell you I love you, Mary," was all he could say.

"And I love you." Her blue eyes met his with glad trustfulness.

"But there's something else. I'll have to tell it before I can ask you to marry me."

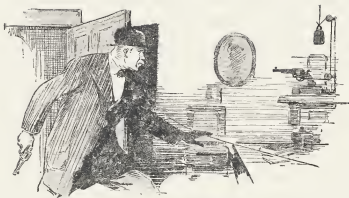
Mary Campbell shook her head.

"Do you think it can ever bother us?" she asked.

"It never can bother us—now."

"Then let's both forget it."

He nodded; heart full of wonderment at her mercy, he drew her forward into his arms.



# Annihilation

By ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "McCarty, Incog," "Dust to Dust," etc.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A QUESTION ANSWERED.

FOR a sickening instant McCarty's stout legs wobbled beneath him, then he drew himself together, and pressing the button of his own flashlight, he strode over the sill.

A strange scene presented itself to his staring eyes. Dennis was clinging weakly to an upright post at the foot of the heavily carved bed which upheld its canopied top, and Orbit himself was lying inert upon his pillows, his firmly molded chin relaxed and the sunken, closed eyes mere blotches of shadow in the grayish pallor of his face. The rich silk pyjama jacket was open at his throat and his arms flung above his head as though helplessness had come upon him in the effort to protect himself. At the same moment McCarty became aware of the pungent, sweetish odor that assailed his own nostrils.

"Chloroform!" he gasped, pointing to a small bottle which stood upon the bed-stand. "Isn't that a towel on the pillow beside his head? Throw it into the corner, Denny, and then get back into the other room, quick!"

Galvanized into life Dennis obeyed, retrieving his flashlight as he went. McCarty waited only to open the two windows wide before rejoining him.

"Aren't we going to raise an alarm?" Dennis demanded excitedly, but McCarty lowered his own voice to a whisper once more.

"We are not, to get ourselves accused! We're going to beat it out the way we came as fast as the Lord 'll let us, and don't open your mouth again till we get beyond the gates! Sure, the devil himself is let loose!"

Down the stairs, through the pantries and lower front hall to the card room—the distance seemed interminable and every foot-

*This story began in the Argosy-Allatory Weekly for November 17.*

step resounded maddeningly in their nerve-shaken ears, but they did not pause until they reached the little side door and Dennis had shot the bolts back.

"Wait till we put on our shoes again," McCarty admonished. "There's no room to do it out in that alley and we're safe enough now, but hurry!"

Sbod once more they stole out, closing the door noiselessly behind them and reconnoitered carefully for the watchman, but he had passed on in the direction of the east gate and they sped to the opposite one, passing through it just before he turned.

All desire for speech seemed to have left Dennis and they walked northward for several blocks before McCarty broke the silence.

"I suppose you think 'twas queer we didn't take that heaven-sent opportunity to search the house without Orbit, at least, to interrupt us, Denny, but there was no telling how long he'd been under that chloroform nor when he'd come out of it, and we could not say we'd scared away whoever did it to him or we would not have sneaked in ourselves."

"How do you know he wasn't dead?" Dennis's tone held a volume of reproach.

"I saw the chest of him rise and fall regular with his breathing, and a whiff like that could not put him out for the count!" McCarty declared impatiently. "Didn't I open the windows on him myself, and tell you to take away the towel that must have slipped down from off his face?"

"'Twas still damp with that stuff!" Dennis muttered with a shudder.

"And chloroform evaporates quicker than anything else I know!" exclaimed his companion. "That shows it must have been given to him the minute, almost, before we went upstairs! The sitting room looked all right to me; did you happen to notice whether anything was upset or not where he was?"

"I did not!" Dennis averred. "I'd the shock of my life when my light flashed over his face! If he's found dead come morning I'll feel as if I'd murdered him myself and not a wink will I sleep nor a free breath will I draw till I know he's all right!"

But when McCarty's rooms were reached

again and the desultory discussion was renewed it was Dennis himself in whom exhausted nature first was revealed and he sank deeply into healthy slumber. His host, however, sat hunched in his armchair till dawn, smoking innumerable cigars and staring into the turbid atmosphere of the familiar room through narrowed eyes as though they beheld strange and evil things.

He finally stretched himself out wearily beside Dennis, however, and dropped into uneasy slumber, to be awakened by the sharp ringing of the telephone. When he turned from it after receiving the frenzied message it was to find his guest draped in his own shabby bathrobe waiting with morbid expectancy for the news.

"Is Orbit dead—"

"He is not! He's got the inspector fair wild with his tale of being drugged in the night and on top of it old Benjamin Parsons reports a robbery! Both the watchmen are fired temporarily and lads from headquarters put in their place," McCarty reported succinctly. "It's a nice, peaceful day you'll be having of it at the fire house while I face the music!"

Dennis gulped with relief.

"Was anything took from Orbit's house, did the inspector say?"

"He'd no time, but I'm thinking he'll be on his way here as soon as he can pacify the two latest victims of outrage there in the Mall. Moreover, if you're going to stop for Brian to shave you after breakfast it will be a miracle that you're not late."

Dennis disappeared promptly into the bathroom and McCarty gathered up the documents and torn encyclopedia page purloined from the Parsons house and stowed them carefully away before making his own hasty toilet. They ate a sketchy breakfast together at the accustomed restaurant and then separated, McCarty returning to his rooms with a sheaf of newspapers to await the coming of his superior.

From the front page of the first paper the pictured face of Horace Goddard stared out at him, big eyed and wistfully alert, and the caption beneath announced that Mr. Eustace Goddard offered twenty-five thousand dollars' reward for information which would lead to the recovery of his son.

A second article, brief but placed in significant juxtaposition to it, declared that no further progress had been made in the investigation into the death of the valet, Alfred Hughes, who had succumbed to the effects of the little known poison physostigmine soon after leaving the residence of his employer, Mr. Henry Orbit, in the New Queen's Mall six days before, but the authorities expected to make an important arrest in connection with it in the immediate future.

Inspector Druct's impatient ring brought McCarty quickly to his feet and as the former sprang up the stairs he flung open the living room door.

"Mac, what the devil have you been doing?"

"Me, inspector?" McCarty's face was a study, but he had misunderstood.

"Yes! Why weren't you on the job? They've raised hell in the Mall last night while I was chasing up some false clues about the Goddard case, and I haven't laid eyes on you since the medical examiner's assistant arrived at Orbit's yesterday!"

"I've been getting a bit of sleep this morning," McCarty replied evasively. "Did you see Parsons? You told me he'd been robbed—did he say what was stole from him?"

"No. That's the queer part of it. When he phoned to headquarters he was anxious to talk, but as soon as I got to his house he began to hedge. A whole pane had been removed from one of the rear windows, and the telephone and Kip alarm system wires were cut, but he couldn't show me that anything in his study had been disturbed. Although he insisted that some documents had been stolen from his filing case he would tell me nothing about them except that some were notes for a book he was writing and the rest of a highly personal nature."

"If 'twas nothing of money value I'd not be bothering about it," McCarty suggested hurriedly. "He got off light considering what's happened at other houses on that block. Look at Orbit! Wasn't he drugged besides, to say nothing of the murder committed there?"

"Yes, but nothing was stolen from him. He tells me he took a bromide to try to

sleep, for the shock of the girl's death in the afternoon had about made him go to pieces, and he was just dozing off when he thought he heard something in the room. He couldn't be sure, and before he could make a move a towel was clapped over his face; the next thing he knew he woke up mighty sick.

"He would have thought the whole thing was a nightmare only there was the towel saturated with chloroform in a corner of the room, the bottle itself on a stand beside his bed and the windows open wider than he had left them. The rest of the household, including Sir Philip Devereux and his valet, Harry Blake, weren't even disturbed. The side door opening from the card room was found unbolted this morning, though Ching Lee swears he fastened it as usual last night, and the telephone wires outside the house were cut, just as Parsons's were."

"Well, if Orbit has recovered and nothing was taken there's been small harm done there, either," McCarty commented, adding: "Is Sir Philip going to stay on at Orbit's?"

"He sails Saturday. I should think he'd find Orbit's kind of hospitality a little strenuous, although he seems to be a fine old sport! Mac, what are we to do? I'm about at the end of my rope, and though the happenings last night don't mean actual tragedy they show how little the scoundrels back of those crimes are afraid of being found out!"

In the clear morning light the inspector's keen, kindly face seemed to have aged years, and McCarty's heart smote him.

"Ob, I don't know, sir," he said. "If just papers that were useful to no one but himself were taken from Parsons and nothing at all from Orbit, maybe the wretch just pulled off those two stunts to throw you off the track of the two murders and the kid's disappearance. Have you heard from Martin?"

"He's back, and Blaisdell, the artist, came with him. Blaisdell's at Goddard's now, offering whatever help he can give, but he hasn't seen Horace since the boy came to his studio to bid him good-by; I talked to him, and I'd swear he's on the level. It's the most infernal mystery—"

"Has the autopsy been performed yet on that girl Lucette?" McCarty's tones had lowered.

"Just an hour ago, Mac, it's got the whole medical bureau going! The examiner agrees with Dr. Allonby, but he can't go any further. The kind of gas that was used is a new one on them, deadlier than any sort the war produced, and they've sent to Washington to find out if anything is known of it there. Thanks." Inspector Druet accepted the cigar which the other proffered, and after it was alight he added: "Fluorine gas is one of its component parts—"

"Fluorine!" McCarty paused with the match halfway to his own cigar.

"Yes, but there are other properties with it; fluorine burns, you know, but there was no trace of that on the girl's face, although her lungs were seared. How it was ever forced on her is beyond me, and the chief is raging like a caged bear!"

He shook his head dejectedly. "If we don't show results mighty soon, I'm due for a transfer, and that means the beginning of the end. But I don't feel that so keenly as I do my sense of failure. I had a chance for quick action when that valet was poisoned, but now that little boy and the fine young French girl— God, it seems as though I had been criminally negligent!"

"Not a bit of it, inspector!" McCarty exclaimed earnestly. "It's just like I was saying to Denny; we're up against the worst case and the cleverest murdering devil in the history of the department, and we'll not be laying him by the heels by working along behind him. It's from what he's going to pull in the future that we'll get him, and then only through outguessing him. Who'll be the next? That's the question we've got to answer."

When, after threshing the situation over thoroughly once more, the inspector finally took his departure, McCarty put in a long hour studying the papers taken from Parson's filing case. The collection of reports, evidently transcripts from court and police records, besides the names of Jennie Malone, Chris Porter, and the boy, Danny Sayre, comprised those of Bert Ferris, Hannah Cray and Bessie Dillon. Ferris had

been convicted of insurance fraud, but Parsons had annotated the report: "Great provocation through need for dependents." Hannah Cray was a shoplifter, and Bessie Dillon a confidence worker. After the names of both women had been written: "Reform assured."

The manuscript proved to be a compilation of scattered and disconnected notes relative to various methods in modern warfare, together with lengthy diatribes against the sin of organized killing. McCarty had little patience to peruse it. The references to fluorine gas gave merely the formula and effect.

Without glancing again at the article on the Calabar bean, McCarty put the torn page away with the other papers, but slipped the odd, silvery bookmark in his pocket. The violent rainstorm which he had already combatted on the way to the restaurant and back was still raging with unabated fury. Taking a stouter umbrella, he clapped on his hat, locked the door behind him, and descended to the street. There he was pounced upon by a young man with a shock of very red hair, who had been lying in wait for him in M. Girard's shop doorway.

"Hey, Mac, got you at last! What brought Inspector Druet to you so early this morning? Anything new turned up in that merry little three-ring circus of crime that is giving a continuous performance under your noses over at the New Queen's Mall?"

The taunt was a shrewdly calculated one, but McCarty grinned affably.

"I see your *Bulletin* this morning has only the story of the girl's death yesterday afternoon, Jimmie. That's old stuff now."

Jimmie Ballard opened his eyes and ducked confidentially under the shelter of McCarty's umbrella.

"For the love of Pete, has there been more doing?" he gasped. "Come across, Mac! You know I'm always ready to do you a good turn! What's up now?"

"We-ell"—McCarty assumed an air of troubled indecision—"of course there's no one between those gates would breathe a word of it to you newspaper guys, and if I was to tell you about the two robberies it

might get back to me. Not being regularly on the force any more, I'd not want the inspector to think—"

"Two robberies!" Jimmie's eyes shone. "What a beat! Mac, let me get the story through to the shop, and we'll have an extra out in half an hour. I'll keep you out of it, I swear—"

"All right, then, if you'll do something for me after." McCarty suddenly reached into his pocket and drew out Parson's bookmark. "Find out what the devil is this made of, and phone me at my rooms to-night. Mind you don't mention it in your story, or never another tip will you get from me! Now, here's what happened."

He repeated briefly the inspector's version of the incidents of the previous night, and then, well satisfied, he continued on his way. It led him on a long and diversified path through that day's storm; to headquarters, the Public Library, the city's mortuary, and the laboratories of a great university up on the heights. For the first time since the inception of the strangely complex case he steered clear of the Mall. It was not until darkness had fallen that he returned to his rooms, rain soaked and weary.

Unlocking the door, he stepped inside the living room and mechanically felt for the light switch in the wall. The button clicked, with no resultant glow from the side brackets and desk. At the same moment he lifted his nose in the air and sniffed sharply.

Some one had been in his rooms again! His lights had been tampered with, for they were on the same current as the house next door, and a ray from there was even now streaking faintly across the airshaft past his bedroom window. Moreover, there had been nothing wrong with his switch the night before! Somebody was laying for him?

Aware that the feeble gas jet in the hall below was yet strong enough to silhouette him vaguely in its glimmering half light, he pulled the door shut behind him and whipped out his revolver.

"Is anybody here?" His bull-throated demand cut the silence. "Come on, you white livered son of a gun, and I'll give

you the fight of your life! If there's a human ear in this room, hear me!"

He waited, tense and tingling, his own ears strained to catch the slightest sound: but none came—no stir of a foot, no whisper of breathing broke the utter stillness in which the echo of his voice had died away. After a minute that seemed ages long, doubt changed to certainty.

Somebody had been there and gone. But had they gone far? What had they done to his rooms that he was not meant to see? What had they left behind them for him to blunder into in the darkness? Had a trap been set for him under his own roof?

McCarty pressed his lips grimly together, his square jaw outthrust, and, keeping his revolver still cocked and ready in his right hand, he reached behind him with the other and propped his umbrella against the wall. Then, half stooping, he advanced a step straight before him in the direction of the fireplace. With infinite caution and delicacy of one in a maze of live wires, his left hand groped about in the pitch blackness surrounding him, but encountered only empty air. He took another step forward, then another.

At last! At the height of about his middle his fingers touched a fine cord drawn across his path so tautly that it vibrated like a harp string beneath a contact as light as a mere breath! Running his fingers along it with the light touch of a drifting feather, he moved to the left until the cord made a sharp turn around the corner of his heavy desk and started forward once more. Now he was facing again toward the fireplace, but the left side of it, and his guiding line was rising! It must be at the height of the mantel now; he must almost have reached the shelf itself!

Moving even more cautiously inch by inch, his fingers traveling with still greater delicacy, he followed the cord to the corner of the mantel and there came in contact with what appeared to be a pulley, rigged ingeniously over the clamp of a portable lamp bracket which had never been fastened there before.

If the cord were broken, something on the other end of that pulley running under the mantel would drop; and then what



would happen? Would the house be blown to bits in the explosion of some infernal machine, or something fall on him from above? It had obviously been intended that he should break that string; but why had it been taken for granted that, finding his lights out of commission, he would walk straight forward from the doorway, instead of perhaps around the wall—

His matches, of course! He wouldn't be supposed to stop and fumble in his clothes for any he might be carrying when a whole box of them were where he always kept them there on the mantel before him! 'Twas from the mantel itself, then, or just under it, that trouble could be looked for if the weight on the other end of that pulley dropped. And that trouble would occur somewhere in a line with the doorway!

Shifting his revolver to his left hand, McCarty felt with the right for the weight dangling from the end of the pulley. His compressed lips widened at the corners in a grim smile as he followed it up again and along under the edge of the mantel until his fingers met the cold ring of a revolver muzzle.

So that was the answer! When the weight dropped, that cord, as fine and strong as fishline, which he could feel wound around the trigger, would snap back, and from that muzzle would streak forth a death message, certain and sure!

But not while McCarty knew it! Dropping his own revolver into his pocket, he swiftly and skillfully disengaged the cord from about the trigger of the other and drew it from the cradle of wire which had been strung over two nails driven into the under side of the mantelshelf. Placing it upon the mantel within easy reach, he found it but the work of a moment to jerk down the lamp bracket and its improvised pulley, break the haul in the cord, and throw the whole mechanical death trap into the empty fireplace.

Then another thought came to him. Suppose the party who had planned that little surprise for him were waiting about in the immediate vicinity, near enough to have seen him come in, close enough at hand to hear the anticipated report? Wouldn't they

be likely to come then to see the result for themselves? Wouldn't that be their next logical move?

Their next move! Since he entered the room McCarty had been too busy to wonder why this reception had been arranged for him, but now a light broke over his mind, and he all but chuckled aloud. He'd been asking himself and Denny a question for the last twenty-four hours, and now by the Lord it was answered for him!

But why should they be disappointed? Why shouldn't they hear that shot, after all, and, in coming to investigate, reveal their own identity? There was nothing above the ceiling but the loft, and nothing above that again but the roof and the clouds that were pouring down rain that minute! With a sudden impulse McCarty seized the revolver from the mantel, aimed it straight up into the air, and fired. Then he jumped nimbly aside and crouched behind the great armchair.

The echo of the shot had scarcely died away when there came a terrific banging upon the entrance door below. This time a hoarse chuckle did force its way from McCarty's throat.

That was their game, was it? To pretend they were just passing and raise all the hell they could getting in, so as to attract attention to the fact that they came after the shot was fired? Let them hang away and break the door down! The one who'd come up those stairs would be the one who had rigged up that murder machine!

The hanging gave place to a moment of silence, and then came a mighty crash, followed by another and another till at length the door fell inward with a snap of the lock and a rending jar. Some one sobbing harshly, chokingly, came bounding and scrambling up the stairs, preceded by a wildly darting flash light which played under the living room door. Then that door also was flung wide, the light swept about, and a broken voice in the throes of mental agony howled dolorously:

"Mac! For the love of God, what's happened to you?"

McCarty came out sheepishly from behind the chair.

"I've been handling revolvers since first

I went on the cops, Denny, with never a mischance, but when the lights went out on me just now all of a sudden whilst I was cleaning this, I'll be damned if it didn't go off in my hand!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### FOREWARNED.

DENNIS'S lacerated emotions were soothed with difficulty. After an old oil lamp was resurrected from the store closet and lighted he seated himself for a pipe and a chat, but the shock had disorganized him beyond concentration on the case and he departed early for the fire house.

McCarty had carefully kept his bulk between his visitor and the sight of what lay in the fireplace. The moment Denny went away he removed the paraphernalia of the death dealing device and locked it in his bedroom closet beneath a pile of old boots, together with the revolver. This had proved on examination to be a replica of his own old service gun. How could his would-be assassin have come into possession of a "police positive," a thirty-eight manufactured for the department alone?

While he was pondering this the telephone rang and Jimmie Ballard's voice came to him over the wire.

"Say, Mac, do you know what that was you handed me to-day? A silver leaf!"

"It looked kind of like a leaf and there was a silvery tinge to it, Jimmie, but I thought it was made of flat plush!" McCarty replied. "I'm no wiser than I was before. What is it?"

"A leaf from an African silver tree, of a species that grows most plentifully on Table Mountain, just back of Cape Town. There's no telling how old it is, for they last forever if they're not handled too much. Where did you get it and what has it to do with that little affair you and I were talking about this morning?"

"Not a thing in the world!" McCarty avowed hastily. "'Tis just something I picked up. I'll be thankful if you'll put it in an envelope and mail it to me special delivery, though."

"All right!" Jimmie laughed. "Of course it isn't important when you've got to have it by special, and you were willing to trade the best beat of the year for information about it, but give me the dope on it one jump ahead of the other boys and I won't ask any more. Did you see our extra? Some pippin, wasn't it?"

McCarty cut short the youthful Jimmie's enthusiasm. He had to stand with his back squarely to the door to talk into the phone and he didn't know when his mysterious visitor might return. That shot had miraculously not aroused the neighborhood, but undoubtedly that was because of the noise of wind and rain. Would the author of his little surprise have sufficient strength of mind to remain away and wait to see if the morning papers held any account of the possible tragedy?

He would, if he was one and the same with the human fiend who had brought all those horrors to pass in the Mall, and that McCarty was morally convinced of. He told Dennis and the inspector, too, that it would be only by outguessing him and anticipating who his next victim was scheduled to be that they could hope to solve the mystery. Now he grinned to himself; little had he thought then who was elected!

But the event of the evening made one fact manifest; the man was afraid! He was beginning to show weakness, his armor was cracking, his nerve was giving way! The desperate chance he had taken of being discovered at his work, the very elaborateness of the scheme itself told of the effort made in a frenzy of guilty apprehension to wipe out one of those who represented the law.

Yet the mighty brain which had conceived and carried to a successful conclusion two such strange crimes as the murders, to say nothing of making away with the child Horace, would be more than a match for the present situation. Having known his first failure, he would be doubly on the alert and wary. McCarty had drawn his fire and in all probability there would be a cessation of crimes in the Mall while he gave his attention to those who threatened to thwart his hideous, purposeless activities.

The storm raged even more fiercely as the hour grew late. For more reasons than one McCarty was reluctant to venture forth for his forgotten dinner. He unearthed a battered percolator, tinned meat and crackers and made a light meal, retiring to bed at last with his revolver beneath the pillow.

When he awakened a dark day had broken. He lay for a time listening to the wind roaring down the chimney and the rain driving in sheets against the windows while he formed an immediate plan. He must work alone, for Denny would be on duty again for twenty-four hours straight, from nine o'clock. He welcomed this fact, for if there were to be any further attempts made upon him the faithful Denny must not share the danger. It would be just his bum luck to walk into a trap not meant for him!

As for himself McCarty meant to give his adversary every opportunity to try again. As he shaved and dressed his blood raced as in the old days with joy of the contest, yet now for the first time in his career he was hunted, not hunter. He had in a twinkling changed places with the arch murderer and child stealer. The thought gave added zest to the problem of the future. He was leaving for his accustomed restaurant when the telephone shrilled and he paused before taking down the receiver.

His visitor of the night before could already have learned from the papers that his attempt had failed. But what if he were ringing up now to be sure that the event had not actually occurred and remained as yet undiscovered? Would he betray himself by surprise at the sound of his intended victim's voice?

McCarty unhooked the receiver, waited a moment, and then called in a sudden, hearty tone:

"Hello!"

"Am I addressing Ex-Roundsman McCarty?" The voice which came to him was elderly and formal, and as he replied in the affirmative he was certain he had never heard it before.

"Inspector Druet suggested that I telephone and ask you for an interview on a strictly private matter, Mr. McCarty. This is Benjamin Parsons speaking, of Number

Seven New Queen's Mall." His tone betrayed not the slightest emotion. "Can you tell me when you will be at liberty to come to me?"

"In one hour, Mr. Parsons," McCarty responded promptly. "'Tis about what happened night before last?"

"Yes." There was a note of finality in the quick, firm monosyllable. "In an hour, Mr. McCarty."

The click of a distant receiver came to his ears and McCarty went out with a puzzled frown. Had the inspector an inkling as to the identity of Parsons's "burglar" and was he passing the buck?

Thrust half under his door he found an envelope with a special delivery stamp; Jimmie Ballard had kept his word and returned the silver leaf. McCarty slipped it into his pocket and went out into the down-pour, but his thoughts were almost immediately diverted from it by the Italian news-vendor on the corner, an acquaintance of many years' standing.

"You on da job again!" White teeth gleamed in the friendly, swarthy countenance. "Diss-a pape' say you gonna fin' da guy w'at murd' da French-a girl!"

It was the *Bulletin*, and Jimmie Ballard's idea of a joke was to announce the rumor that former Roundsman Timothy McCarty, whose achievements in the department had been unique and notable, had been reattached to the detective bureau for special investigation in connection with the crime wave in the New Queen's Mall. Important developments might be expected shortly.

McCarty passed it by with a grunt. Then his eye was caught by a brief paragraph lower down on the page and he stood still, unheeding the rain which streamed down his neck from his tilted umbrella. It was a bald statement that George Radley, the poisoner, who escaped from Sing Sing a month before, had been found wandering in a hopelessly demented condition on the upper East Side and would undoubtedly be committed to Matteawan. The clothing he wore was being traced in an effort to locate the possible accomplices to his escape.

With a nod to the news vendor McCarty hurried on at last. While he awaited his order at the little restaurant he gave him-

self up to reflection. Was that why Parsons had sent for him? Had he learned that the escaped prisoner received aid from beneath his roof?

He ate hastily and then made all speed to the New Queen's Mall, where just within the gate he ran into Inspector Druet.

"You've heard from Parsons?" the latter asked.

McCarty nodded.

"He said you told him to send for me. Whatever for, sir?" His tone was blandly innocent. "What can I tell the old gentleman about his lost papers?"

"It's what he'll tell you, if you can get it out of him; I can't," confessed his superior. "He's got something up his sleeve, all right, and if he weren't such a well known character I'd think he guessed more about that robbery than he was willing to say! The other one who was holding out on us came across last night, but it isn't going to help any except to remove one more possibility."

"Who was it?" demanded McCarty.

"Eustace Goddard. The only thing that has kept him and his wife both going during these three days since the boy disappeared was their own private suspicion that he had been kidnaped for ransom and would be held safely until the exchange could be made. But now that hope has gone. The man they thought had taken Horace away was a former business associate of Goddard's, down and out now. He applied to Goddard for financial help, it seems, at a time when it would have saved him. When it was refused he threatened to make Goddard pay if he stripped him of the most precious thing he had.

Goddard has been quietly looking for him since the trouble came and expecting him hourly to make a demand for a large sum. That was why he was willing to offer such a huge reward. Last evening, however, he ran him to earth and found out that the poor devil had been ill in a sanitarium for months and didn't know anything about Horace. Mrs. Goddard is almost insane—Allonby is attending her—and Goddard himself is nearly as bad. I can only put him off with the same old promises and bunk! Look over there now;

that's the boy's shepherd dog, Max. He's grieving himself to death, they tell me. Mac, if we don't do something soon—"

"We'll be sitting tight and let the other fellow show his hand, the guy that's been pulling all these murders and such."

They had passed down the block together toward the Parsons house and as he spoke McCarty glanced across the street to the court beside the Goddards. The slim, smooth coated shepherd dog was pacing restlessly up and down with the slinking, mechanical movement of a beast in captivity, his swaying head hung low and tail drooped.

The inspector followed his companion's gaze.

"Trafford says he tried to coax Max to go for a walk, but the dog won't go further than that from the house. They're one-man creatures, that breed, and the boy was his god. If you can get anything out of the old gentleman that looks like straight dope phone me at the medical examiner's office."

He went on and McCarty ascended the steps of the Parsons residence and rang the bell. His summons was replied to after some little delay by a youth who carried himself smartly, if awkwardly, in his page's uniform. The bright if somewhat weak face seemed abnormally pale, however, and his sharp eyes shifted in a scared fashion.

"Name's McCarty," the newcomer announced briefly. "Mr. Parsons expects me."

"Yes, sir!" The youth's tone was almost servile. "You can go right back to his study, sir. I'll show you!"

He led the way to the room which McCarty had already visited surreptitiously two nights before and knocked on the door.

"Come in." The same dignified, elderly voice which had sounded over the telephone answered the rapping and a man rose slowly from behind the desk as they entered.

He was tall and powerfully built, with a keen, intellectual face softened by warm, gray eyes and a well molded mouth, sensitive yet firm. His finely shaped head was covered with a shock of snow white hair as long as a mane and his old-fashioned high stock and severely cut black coat made

him resemble a figure from the past. He looked to McCarty's eyes as though he might have stepped out of one of the frames in his own portrait gallery, but there was no suggestion of a pose about him. Without sound or gesture he appeared to dominate the room and his caller felt almost abashed in his presence.

What would the old gentleman think if he knew the actual burglar stood before him? McCarty could feel his honest face grow hot, but he held his chin a trifle higher. After all, Parsons had known about fluorine gas and powdered Calabar bean, he'd a bunch of crooks in his house and knew it, and when his notes had been taken he didn't feel like coming clean about them! He might have a bit of explaining to do himself!

"Lieutenant McCarty, sir." The elevation in rank was patent flattery, and McCarty's eyes twinkled as Benjamin Parsons bowed.

"That will do, Danny. Mr. McCarty," he added as the page boy withdrew, "I have asked you to come here because your inspector is occupied with matters of graver import to the little community in the Mall. From your question over the telephone this morning I gather you have been informed of the occurrence here on Wednesday night?"

"Yes, Mr. Parsons," McCarty replied. "Your house was entered by way of the rear window, wasn't it, and some papers taken? As I heard it, the wires were cut outside and a pane of glass knocked out."

"An interior alarm system of my own was also very cleverly disconnected so that it would not register in my bedroom. But won't you sit down?"

A slender, patrician, blue veined hand waved to a chair and McCarty obeyed as though it had been a command. "All this is as unimportant as is the identity of the intruder, or his identity would be if he had come merely for gain like the usual house-breaker. But this he was not. Articles of value were practically within reach of his hand—gold and silver plate, ivories and bronzes and ceramics which would have meant a fortune to the ordinary burglar. They remained undisturbed while the docu-

ments he searched for and found could be of no possible pecuniary benefit to him."

Mr. Parsons's language and choice of phrase would have seemed stilted and pedantic had it not been for the perfect ease and lack of mannerism with which he spoke, and his seriously intent eyes were fastened on McCarty in steady gaze which the latter found somehow disconcerting. He cleared his throat nervously.

"The inspector told me 'twas notes for a book that was missing, and some other papers that was personal," he remarked.

"Personal to others than myself, I regret to say." Mr. Parsons shook his head. "That is why I did not go into particulars at first discovery which, taken in connection with the rest, leaves me no choice. The personal documents removed from this filing case over here related to the unfortunate past history of several people whom I count among my friends. It would be unjust to give publicity to them now, much less to permit these records to remain in unworthy hands.

"The manuscript of my book is perhaps small loss to the world, but it is the result of years of profound thought and research. I may add that it was intended as a message, an appeal for universal peace and I had dwelt in detail upon the horrors of the last war, describing in full the methods employed by man to destroy his fellows. I am stating this because one of the weapons so described was fluorine gas, and the formula was given. Fluorine gas has been mentioned in the papers in connection with the sad death of the young nurse across the street. But I did not even think of the coincidence until I made a further discovery last night."

"What was it?" McCarty felt that the question was expected of him, although he well knew what was coming. Was the old gentleman the grand character he appeared, or as shrewd as they make them and playing safe? He could have blushed for his own suspicious mind, but Parsons called the crooks his "friends" and was trying to protect them. What the devil did it all mean?

"When your inspector first called upon me to make certain inquiries last week at

the time a man-servant—from the same house as that in which the young girl passed away—also died, he told me of the poison believed to have been used; physostigmine."

"Calabar bean." McCarty nodded.

"Quite so. I had never heard of it, as it happened, and I looked it up in some books of reference I have; books in common use in every home of intelligent interest. I was called away before I had finished reading the articles and marked the page. That page, Mr. McCarty, has been torn from my encyclopedia, and this could only have been done on Wednesday evening."

The gentle yet dominating voice had continued in its level, perfectly controlled monotone. McCarty looked down at the floor, but felt impelled to raise his eyes again. If only the old gentleman would look away for a minute!

"It seems like a queer sort of burglar that would tear a page out of a book he could find anywhere, and the fact that it was an article about Calabar bean, and the notes on fluorine gas gone, too—" The words stuck in McCarty's throat, but he forced himself to go on: "Why should he have took them just from here, when the damage was done with the both of them, and how did he know where to get them, anyway?"

"I have been asking myself those questions, but I cannot answer them. However, I am convinced that those two coincidences are more than coincidences and it is my duty to report them."

"Yes, of course." McCarty shuffled one foot. "Mr. Parsons, what's become of your butler, Chris Porter?—Roberts, he called himself here."

He had launched the question with deliberate abruptness, but the gray eyes did not waver.

"You knew of his identity? The record of his misfortune was one of those taken from my filing case."

"I recognized him and he made a certain confession to me the other day." McCarty returned the gaze with interest now and he saw Mr. Parsons start slightly, a faint flush rising in the smooth pallor of his cheeks.

"A confession? Christopher was a broken man, subjected to a persecution which

would have been unfair even if he were guilty of the charge for which he had suffered imprisonment, but I am convinced of his absolute innocence!" he asserted vigorously. "A grave miscarriage of justice had been committed. I could not restore to him the years which our penal system had taken from him, but I was endeavoring to help him get on his mental and moral feet again, to win back his self-respect! Mr. McCarty, if Christopher made any supposed confession it must have been wrung from him by coercion! Innocent or guilty he has paid the penalty the State demanded!"

"Sure, for complicity in that poisoning case, if that's what you mean, but 'twas not that he confessed. Mr. Parsons, I'd like to ask you something." McCarty bent forward. "If a guy—I mean a man—was sent up and escaped and you thought he was innocent would you think it your duty to hide him or turn him over to the law again?"

"I should deliver him to the authorities." The answer came without an instant's hesitation. "Personal opinion cannot be allowed to weigh against the mandates of our laws. Otherwise our whole social fabric would centuries ago have been undermined. The individual must be submerged in the collective body if civilization is to endure. But why do you ask?"

"You knew that Radley, the fellow sentenced with Porter, escaped a month ago and that he was caught last night?"

"I knew that he had escaped, but not that he was recaptured!" Mr. Parsons spoke in oddly shocked accents. "The newspapers doubtless have an account of it, but I was too disturbed in mind this morning to glance at them. Where was the unfortunate man found?"

"Not where he was last Sunday, Mr. Parsons!" McCarty retorted significantly. "He's supposed to be crazy now, so he'll go to the asylum instead of back up the river, but he wasn't crazy last Sunday, nor the week and more before that, when he laid hid in the empty house next door here, fed from your table and cared for by some one in your house! That was Porter's confession, and I'm asking you where is he?"

"He has gone!" Parsons rested his elbow on his desk and shielded his eyes with his hand. "I never suspected this! Christopher laid the table for breakfast as usual this morning and arranged the mail and the newspapers. It must have been then that he saw the account of Radley's capture and run away, panic-stricken, that he might fall into the hands of the law again! I have thought that he seemed more deeply troubled this week. If he had only come to me, and let me convince him of his higher duty! I have failed with him—failed!"

Deep distress throbbled with a note of pain in his tone, but McCarty persisted dryly:

"That's as may be, sir. He left about the time the papers came? That 'll be around eight o'clock? Was it before or after you phoned to me that you knew of it?"

Mr. Parsons's hand fell.

"Just before. I knew no reason for his departure and he left no word, but the condition of his room showed hurried flight. It was then that I decided to place myself unreservedly in your hands."

"Because of that missing dope about fluorine gas and Calabar bean, and his own past history?" McCarty demanded. "Because he'd already been convicted of poison—"

"Stop!" Mr. Parsons rose. "Christopher was innocent of that old charge and he was equally innocent of the crimes which have been committed this past week! He was mistaken in his sense of duty, but not a murderer!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CHECKMATE!

McCarty left the Parsons house a few minutes later, his mind a chaos of conflicting impressions. With the sonorous, dignified tones still ringing upon his ear and the deeply concerned gaze yet seemingly bent upon him, Benjamin Parsons appeared the epitome of rectitude and righteousness. But had he been as certain of Porter's innocence as he claimed, and was he as ignorant of where he had gone?

He crossed the street to Orbit's house and glanced again into the court between that and Goddard's. Max was still there, but he had lain down as though exhausted and his ribs, glistening with the rain, showed pitifully gaunt. Why didn't they take the poor fellow in? McCarty stopped and spoke coaxingly to him. The dog slowly rolled his lack luster eyes upon him, but made no other response.

For a long minute McCarty stood thoughtfully regarding him and then at last continued on his way, but there was a curiously absent look upon his face.

Ching Lee admitted him and took him to the library where he had first been received. A small fire of some strange, peatlike fuel was burning on the hearth, sending out iridescent flames and a faint, pervasive odor, as of sandalwood. Before it Orbit was seated with a stout, florid, healthy looking gray haired man in tweeds.

"Good morning, McCarty. I rather thought that you or the inspector would look in on me this morning." Orbit turned to his guest. "Sir Philip, this is McCarty, the official who is working with Inspector Druet on the investigation into this hideous mystery which seems to involve nearly all of us here in the Mall."

Sir Philip Devereux nodded to the ex-rounsmen in cordial democracy.

"Shockin' affair, this! Shockin'!" he commented. "Here for a little private chat with Mr. Orbit? I'll leave you—"

"No, don't go, Sir Philip!" Orbit murmured sniffingly. "You know all the circumstances and McCarty and I haven't anything private to discuss. I hope he's brought me some news! You heard about what happened to me the other night?"

"I did that." McCarty nodded. "What do you think 'twas done for, if nothing was taken?"

"Haven't the remotest idea. Sit down here by the fire, man, you're soaked through!" Orbit added hospitably. "I'll have Ching Lee bring you a touch of something from my private stock—"

"No, thank you, Mr. Orbit; I've a twinge of the gout now and then, though you mightn't think it," McCarty explained speciously. "I just dropped by to see if

you'd thought of anything to add to what you told the inspector about the chloroforming?"

"Nothing. The whole thing happened so quickly and the impressions left on my mind were so vague that I am afraid I can be of little use to you. One thing seems certain; the fellow didn't intend me to die from the effect of it, since he stopped to open the windows and throw away the cloth he had used to anesthetize me! The incident is absolutely inexplicable except on the supposition that his only intention was to terrorize me. And that is really too absurd to consider."

"It was an outrage!" declared Sir Philip suddenly. "Damme, it passes belief! The chap must be a fiend—or mad! What object could he have in killing poor Hughes? I say, there was a valet for you! Then the girl, too! That poison gas theory seems to be hally rot to me, too utterly impossible with you there in the room, old son, but she is dead, isn't she? There you are!"

He leaned back in his chair and puffed thoughtfully at his cigar. His host turned to McCarty with a faint hint of amusement in his eyes, but it was quickly overshadowed by sadness again.

"The girl is dead, poor creature, and I cannot help feeling that the blame in some way rests at my door, for I invited her in. However, her death was brought about the child escaped, though; we have that to be thankful for! We are none of us safe here on the Mall while the murderer is free to come and go in our houses at will, killing with impunity whenever the horrible impulse comes to him! I was reluctant to offer my hospitality to Sir Philip under these harrowing circumstances, but he was willing to abide by the consequences."

"Ripping experience!" The baronet nodded again. "Sorry I'm sailing to-morrow! Like nothing better than to stop and see it through! Old chap over the way was robbed the same night, I hear. Any clues left there, McCarty?"

There was no hint of sarcasm in his tone, but McCarty flushed darkly. Then he darted a quick glance at the questioner and a slow smile dawned. The Britisher was trying to get his goat!

8 A

"Yes, sir, the same as here," he replied. "Mr. Orbit, you've that chloroform bottle? The inspector says 'twas found on a stand beside your bed."

"Ching Lee has it, I believe. Would you like to see it?" He rang the bell without waiting for a reply. "The cloth used was a towel from my own bathroom; it's evident that the fellow was familiar with the house. But how he got in that side door leading from the card room if Ching Lee really bolted it as usual the night before— Oh, Ching Lee?"

The butler had appeared silently in the doorway and now Orbit addressed him in a rapid patter of Chinese. Ching Lee, as impassive and wooden of countenance now as before the tragedy, bowed and departed. McCarty turned once more to Orbit.

"What time was it, as near as you can figure, that you were doped?"

"I should say around two o'clock in the morning, perhaps a trifle before. Sir Philip and I sat up till after midnight playing chess, and when I retired I tried for more than an hour to sleep before I took a bromide. Things grew hazy after that, and I don't know how long I dozed before I was conscious of some one in the room."

"You got no whiff of anything else before the chloroform hit you?" McCarty asked. "No smell of a pipe or cigar if the guy was a smoker, maybe?"

"I smoke so constantly myself that I would scarcely have noticed it even if there had been time and I were fully awake." Orbit raised his brows. "You smoke yourself, McCarty; could you have detected it?"

"Sure." McCarty stated the fact modestly. "I've not the nose Denny has, but 'tis easy to tell the smell of a cigar from a pipe even if it's only hanging about the clothes of a person. A rich, full flavored cigar with a body to it leaves a scent that a man will travel with whether he gets it himself or not."

"Denny?" Orbit repeated. "Oh, you mean your associate, Riordan? Yes, I remember he detected the odor of that small blaze here a week ago, when the monkey upset the cigar lighter in my room. Odd faculty, that, eh, Sir Philip?"

"Jolly, I fancy. I only wish I had it!"



Sir Philip chuckled. "My man makes away with my cigars at a shockin' rate, but I never can catch him at it, the cheeky beggar! I say, no one's disturbed our board, have they?"

"Indeed, no," Orbit replied. "I gave strict orders and we can finish to-night. Sir Philip held the amateur chess championship for Great Britain for five years."

He added this to McCarty and then turned as Ching Lee appeared again and spoke to him once more in his native tongue. The butler advanced and placed in McCarty's hands the bottle he had seen in Orbit's room two nights before.

"Has it been uncorked, do you know, since 'twas found beside you?" McCarty regarded the contents critically, removed the cork himself for a cautious whiff. Hurriedly replacing it, he handed the bottle back to Ching Lee and rose.

"I don't think so," Orbit whipped out his handkerchief and pressed it to his nose. "I am susceptible to *that* odor, at any rate, since Wednesday night! Sorry not to be of any greater help to you. I shall depend on you and the inspector to keep me informed of any developments that may arise."

Seeing him get up from his chair, Ching Lee had waited to show him out. As McCarty trudged toward the east gate through the driving rain once more he shook his head. Come night, it would be a week since Hughes had been done to death, and the end was not yet clear!

He made his way to the lunchroom on Third Avenue which he and Dennis had previously visited and in deference to the day ordered fried oysters. They were long in coming and he rested his elbows wearily on the table. Was he getting too old for the game, after all? In days gone by when he was in harness he'd have got to the truth long since and though it had been a dog's life in more ways than one he regretted more than ever to have left it and grown rusty.

All at once he straightened in his chair and sat staring at the cynical warning to "watch your hat and coat" on the wall before him as if the legend was wholly unfamiliar to him. The belated appearance

of the waitress with the oysters roused him from his stupor and he rose hurriedly.

"Don't want 'em!" he muttered thickly. "Gimme the check; I got to beat it!"

Spilling a dime onto the table he took the slip of pasteboard, paid for his untouched food mechanically at the cashier's desk and went out as one in a dream. Once having turned the corner he seemed galvanized into life and set off briskly enough for the subway.

Twenty minutes later he presented himself at headquarters. After being closeted with the chief of the detective bureau for some little time he departed armed with certain credentials for the main office of the telephone company.

There he spent a long and seemingly unproductive hour going over the calls from the Gotham exchange, which included the New Queen's Mall, for the previous Tuesday.

Over Goddard's private wire had gone numerous messages before the call to Blaisdell's studio by Trafford. In the late afternoon when Horace's continued absence had caused alarm there were fully a score of numbers registered before Goddard himself had summoned McCarty.

Orbit's telephone, too, had been busy with the caterer, decorator, florist and a musical agency in connection with the function of the afternoon and three messages to the coal dealer. Innumerable others followed, presumably sent by guests until the evening was far advanced.

Only four calls had been sent from the Bellamy house and they appeared to have been made by the lady herself, for they were to modiste, hairdresser, perfumer, and a prominent department store.

Parsons's number, besides local tradesmen, had been connected with a foreign consulate, several charitable societies and a banking house, while the Sloane household had communicated with Dr. Altonby, a drug store, an agency for male nurses, the office number of a noted financier and several residence numbers of well-known social lights.

McCarty copied one or two from each list and sallied forth to verify them, but although the afternoon was long, twilight

had not yet come when he returned to his rooms and entered cautiously.

They had not been intruded upon on this occasion, however, but he remained only long enough to secure the page torn from the encyclopedia. Then he slopped out again through the teeming street to the fire house which domiciled Engine Company No. 023.

Dennis was matching nickels with Mike in the dormitory and reaping a rich harvest. He hastily promised the loser his revenge later and slid down the pole to join McCarty.

"I've looked for you all afternoon!" he declared reproachfully, adding: "You've news! I can see it in the eye of you, and I might have known something would start whilst I was out of it!"

"There's nothing new," McCarty responded quietly. "I've a queer notion in my head, but it's too sickening to spring, even after all we know has happened, till I get hold of something to back it up. Parsons phoned for me this morning—the old gentleman himself—and told me the truth about what was missing since Wednesday night, which was no news. He said it was clever, the way you'd disconnected the inside alarm arrangement—"

"Me!" Dennis's leathery countenance blanched. "'Tis what I get for letting you lead me into breaking the law! Now I'll get thrown out of the department and pinched, and Molly will change the baby's name!"

"Oh, Parsons did not know 'twas you, Denny; he just said it had been cleverly done," McCarty hastened to explain. "I sprung it on him about Porter and Radley, and asked him what would he do if a fellow escaped that he thought was innocent and came to him. He spoke up quick that he'd turn him over to the authorities anyway; 'twould be his higher duty to our social fabric, whatever that is."

"It would, would it?" Dennis ejaculated in fine scorn. "The social fabric could go to blazes for all of me, but I'd stick to a pal, innocent or no! Howsom-ever, I've not the grand, cold blooded principles of him! You know the poor devil's been caught, crazier than a loon?"

McCarty nodded.

"Porter knows it, too. He's beaten it, for fear he'll be sent up for hiding him." He finished his account of the morning's interview and then drew the torn page from his pocket. "There's more to this thing about the Calabar bean that I didn't read you, Denny, so I brought it around, and maybe 'twill give us an idea. Listen: 'Calabar bean. Ordeal nut. The seed of *Physostigma venenosum*, a twining, half shrubby plant, native of Africa—'"

"What of it?" Dennis was frankly bored. "How is that going to help?"

"Wait a bit. 'The kernel is hard and white, and yields its virtue to alcohol and less perfectly to water.'"

"I'll bet it does, or they'd never have got it down Hughes, if what we've heard of his habits is straight!" interrupted Dennis, his interest once more aroused. "There you've got it, Mac! Find the last one he took a drink with, and you'll have the guy that croaked him!"

"That's not all," McCarty began again: "'The beans are reddish gray, or '—um—' kidney shaped, and about the size '— never mind that. 'Care should be taken to avoid spontaneous—'"

"Did you trail around here in all the rain to give me a botany lesson?" Dennis demanded indignantly. "'Tis not from any book you'll be learning the truth. I was that upset last night, what with the revolver shot and all, that I never thought to ask you; but what did the old guy you know uptown say about that busted blue balloon? Could he make out from the way it was rotting before our eyes the kind of gas there was in it?"

McCarty hesitated and then said slowly: "Denny, you'll mind the other night after we had examined it I put it in a cracker box while we went for a bite to eat, and when we came home you saw me hunting around for something?"

"You were trying to whistle, too!" Dennis nodded. "That always means you think you're putting something over! What was it?"

"I was hunting for that cracker box. I knew the minute we came back into the room somebody'd been there, for there

was the stale smell of a heavy cigar on the air, not as if he'd been smoking right then, but the scent of it was strong on him as he passed through the place. When I found the missing box I knew what he'd come for."

"Think of that now! Do you know what it means, Mac? The murderer knows you, and not the medical examiner's assistant, had taken it from the conservatory. I wonder if he followed us from then on? The sight of us parading through the streets with all them balloons would have told him we were on if he wasn't blind!" Dennis grinned. "Leave the medical examiner find out what kind of gas was it; we know how 'twas give to her, though not what busted the balloon right in her face nor how the gas got in it. The notion come to me that 'twas not meant to kill Lucette, anyway."

"Not kill her!" exclaimed McCarty. "The first whiff of it must have knocked her cold!"

"But what if it was intended for the baby and not for her?" Dennis lowered his voice. "What if the murderer has a craze for killing children? I've heard tell of such things, and so have you. Suppose Hughes was poisoned by mistake in the first place for Ching Lee, so that little Fu Moy wouldn't be protected? Then Horace was taken away and maybe killed, and the Bellamy baby was next on the list—"

"Denny, you're running wild!" McCarty interrupted in his turn. "The murderer's brain has got a twist to it, but he's not as crazy as all that. Baby killers are just stupid, low brutes without the shrewdness or knowledge to plan such crimes as we're up against now. We're fighting a mind, not a fist with a knife or a club in it."

"So you've been saying!" Dennis retorted disgustedly. "That comes of those books you've been reading. Whilst you've been figuring out his ancestors and the blood that's in him to decide is he in the 'born' or 'habit' class, like that diagnostic book of yours has it, he's been having an Old Home Week in the Mall, kidnaping and killing right and left! 'Twill be a week to-night—"

McCarty beat a hasty retreat and took his solitary way to the restaurant, where

he ate a hearty dinner to make up for the deferred lunch. Then he returned to the Mall to prowling about like an unquiet if somewhat too material ghost. The rain had stopped at last, and although the sky was still partially overcast, the glimmer of a few stars gave promise of a clear dawn. Lights were brilliant in the Sloane, Parsons and Orbit residences, but low in Goddard's and Mrs. Bellamy's, where the lady had been in a hysterical state since the murder of her baby's nurse.

Yost had been relieved from his post at the mortuary to take the place of the night watchman, and McCarty walked up and down with him for more than an hour, discussing the strange chain of tragedies. All at once as they passed the court next to the Goddard house, he heard a low, coaxing masculine voice. Investigating, they came upon Trafford bending over something which lay in the shadows.

"Come on, old fellow!" the tutor was saying. "Come along in the house like a good boy! Horace isn't here, Max—it's no good waiting—"

"'Tis a strange acting dog, and no mistake, Trafford," McCarty remarked.

The tutor looked up.

"He's grieving himself to death," he said. "He hasn't touched a morsel of food since Tuesday, though we've tempted him with everything; and he is so weak he can scarcely stand. He waits about out here all the time for Horace to come home. I've got to get him in now if I have to carry him."

At this juncture, however, Max rose languidly to his feet and began sniffing at McCarty's boots, whining softly.

"'Tis like he was trying to talk!" the latter exclaimed.

"I wish he could, if he knows anything," Trafford replied sadly. "If Horace isn't found soon, his mother will lose her mind. McCarty, can't you people do any thing? Even to know the—the worst would be better than this horrible uncertainty and suspense!"

"The lad's disappearance is not the half of what we're up against, Trafford," McCarty reminded him. "We're doing everything mortal to find him, and soon, maybe

to-morrow, we're going to take a big chance."

He watched while the tutor led the dog into the bouse. Then, shaking his head, he proceeded to Orbit's, and rang the bell. It was little Fu Moy, resplendent in his embroidered serving jacket, who opened the door and, without announcing him, beckoned and preceded him to the library, where the last interview had taken place.

The room was in deep shadow save for the glow from the hearth and a single broad beam from a bridge lamp which played down upon a chessboard laid out on a small table. At opposite sides of it two silent, intent figures sat as immovably as graven images. If they were aware of McCarty's appearance they made no sign.

Were they hypnotized, or something? The two of them couldn't be asleep, sitting bolt upright like that! McCarty waited a good five minutes, and then advanced slowly into the room, but still they appeared oblivious.

Orbit was sitting forward, his eyes glued on the board, his hands clasped and elbows resting on the arms of the chair, but the florid faced Englishman appeared to be gazing off into space with the intent yet absent look of one absorbed in profound concentration.

Then slowly Orbit's right had disengaged itself from the other, and he moved a piece upon the board, his hand almost mechanically seeking its former position.

A little smile twitched at the corners of Sir Philip's mouth, and with a swift intake of his breath he moved, sweeping from the board the figure of shining white with which Orbit had just played. The latter instantly lifted his head and raised his eyes to the high, beamed ceiling, and with the slight gesture the first sound broke the stillness, as a muffled, barely audible exclamation came from Sir Philip's throat.

Orbit made one more move and then glanced in amused commiseration at his friend.

"Checkmate, Sir Philip! I shall give you your revenge in London next season!"

"I say, old son, that was damned clever! Led me right into ambush, what? I wish some of the masters could have seen it!

Oh, there you are, McCarty! Are you a chess player, by any chance?"

"No, sir." McCarty advanced a step farther. "Mr. Orbit, Fu Moy showed me straight in, and I waited so as not to disturb you."

"That's all right!" Orbit nodded pleasantly. "Our game is over. You have news for me?"

"Of a sort. You recall saying on Wednesday that you thanked Heaven the Bellamy baby was old enough to talk?"

"Yes!" Orbit responded eagerly. "I have tried several times to see Mrs. Bellamy and little Maude. The mother is still almost overcome by the narrow escape of her child from the same terrible death the poor nurse suffered, and will not permit it out of her sight for a moment, while she herself is too prostrated to see any one."

"The little one talked to me the other day," McCarty vouchsafed.

"She did? Why didn't you tell me?" Orbit pushed back his chair and rose. "Did she see any one, hear anything? Tell me, for God's sake! This may be most important."

His fine eyes had lighted, and the latent excitement seemed to have communicated itself to his guest, for Sir Philip also rose.

"No, sir. She knew no more than you or I, but she kept asking for her balloon. It seems Lucette had bought it for her off a wop by the gate just before you invited them in. 'Twas a blue one, the baby said, and she was persistent about it, but I recall seeing no toy balloon in that conservatory. Did you?"

"No." Orbit shook his head. "I really don't know, though; I didn't notice particularly. Surely it couldn't have had anything to do with the case, though. What is it, Fu Moy?"

The little coffee-boy spoke rapidly in Chinese, and after a moment Orbit turned with a gesture which took in both Sir Philip and McCarty.

"I am wanted on the telephone. Will you excuse me?"

When he had left the room the Englishman glanced again at the chessboard with the self-centered absorption of the enthusiast.

"Too bad you didn't understand that play. Dash it all! Very clever! On the twenty-first move, his knight captured my pawn. Check. I moved the king to the queen's square. By Jove, he moved the queen to the bishop's sixth. Check. Ah! I captured his queen with my knight, and then the bally Orbit moved his bishop to

king's seventh. Checkmate! Devilish trick, I should say. Really, McCarty, he had served me with what is known in chess parlance as 'the immortal Partie.'"

"Checkmate," repeated McCarty slowly. "That means calling the turn, then, blocking every play. And the secret of it is—looking ahead."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



## VISIONS

**B**LEAK the autumn night without,  
Cold the hearth within,  
Loud the gale with roar and rout,  
Doleful clash and din.

Swirling clouds are scurrying by—  
Restless spirits they;  
Melting, merging, still they fly;  
Doom comes with the day.

Though the tempest's towering arm  
Rock the flaming skies,  
There be places, hidden, calm,  
Where his fury dies.

So my spirit, void of will,  
Restless, ever flies  
Round a center that is still,  
Wherein dreamland lies.

Raging storms of passion cease  
On this hallowed shore;  
Tempest wrath is stilled, and peace  
Bideth evermore.

Dreamland visions cluster round,  
Visions of the past;  
Wraiths of days, all spectral gowned—  
Days too fond to last.

Wraiths of many another scene—  
Scenes I hold full dear,  
And the dearer might-have-been—  
These in dreams appear.

So I, counting storm and strife  
As but things that seem,  
Find a richer, sweeter life  
In the land of dreams.

*Harold White.*



# Overcharged

By WINONA GODFREY

FOR the first time since that niftiest, custom-built sport model car had hit him amidships, Mr. Nevin Jenkins Lashbrooke did not have a distinct pain, nevertheless his young brow remained distinctly clouded. His mother always called him "Nevin dear," and he had carefully fostered his schooldays nickname "Jenks," which made mother shudder. Both names fit pretty well. Manlike, he preferred the word to think him all "Jenks," although he knew well enough that there was a hideously large strain of Nevin in his secret soul.

He lay on a couch in his room at Mrs. MacAllister's, a large, shabby, sunny room in the back of the house whose windows overlooked Mrs. Mac's hilarious tangle of garden, with the fig tree that was her special pride in the middle of it. His scowl deepened as he heard his best friend Tim Atkins saying on the stairs: "No, don't bother, I'll go right up!"

Darn Tim and his facetiousness.

Tim, in his own patter, "blew in."

"Hello, old kid, how goes it? Right as rain, I hear. Met the eminent Dr. Green-

ways just outside—said you all but threw him out, and he fully expected you to be as good as new in another few days. Feeling all right?"

"Oh, sure," growled Nevin.

Mr. Atkins dropped into a chair and lighted a cigarette, then he leaned forward and inquired in a mock-thrilled whisper. "Any callers to-day?"

Nevin glared at him. How in thunder he had stayed on good terms all these years with this insufferable ass!

Tim grinned back. "What's a broken collar-bone when served with all the ingredients of romance! Just nothing a-tall! Of all the luck! Now if it had been me, some farmer in a Ford would have broken a leg for me and sued me for damages. But you—ah! You and them beaux yeux and Miss Beresford Lane! You were hit by a ford. Beres-ford! Never thought of that before! That's *good*. Hit in the collar-bone by a couple of millions and every day they've come over and held your hand!"

Silence from the invalid. About every day Tim had played this humorous theme

with variations. He inspected Nevin now with a little surprise, not understanding why he was not being more cheered-up by this kidding. Must not be feeling so good after all. Tim's loud cheerful tones lowered.

"Say, it was tough luck. Just when you were on your way to collect the reward of virtue! She ought to be in jail—tearing along at that rate. You know, I was thinking about her this morning when I stopped at Jim's to have the battery tested. Overcharged, that's what she is! Nothing to do but play, nothing to think of but dress and dance and flirt and how to spend money. Not a responsibility or a need, and the very devil of a dynamo piling up energy all the time and urging her into seven kinds of mischief. Yep, overcharged, that's what she is." Tim paused, much pleased with his analogy, and to find Lashbrooke interested.

"I expect that's so," the latter thoughtfully agreed.

"Come to think of it," Tim pursued, "didn't the papers say that Grace Wrayburn was a pal of this Lane girl? You know, old Wrayburn's daughter that got into that mess with a riding-master? It was one of those things. I forget just what."

"Oh, I never read that rot," said Nevin irritably.

"Well, they're an overcharged bunch." Tim repeated the adjective with relish. "The little Wrayburn was just playing around, but there was an awful explosion." He looked at his watch, and rose. "Must be getting back. Only had a few minutes."

"I'll be down Monday," said Nevin without enthusiasm.

"All right. Fine! I'll tell the old man. And say, June was asking after you again." He shook Nevin's band. "Now shout if I can do anything for you."

The convalescent seemed relieved by Tim's exit. If he'd just get away before—But no, young Mr. Atkins's most amiable tones once more rose from below: "Oh, good-morning, Miss Lane! How are you this morning? Fine!—coming along in great style—"

"Oh, damn," commented Mr. Nevin Lashbrooke.

Then a murmur of feminine voices; Mrs.

Mac's robust soprano, and that other so cool, so clear, so assured, so individual, that it could not possibly belong to anybody in the world but to Miss Beresford Lane. In another moment she had entered to him.

Having two—or ten—million dollars in her own right, it goes without saying that Beresford was a beauty. As a hundred-a-month stenographer the designation would probably have been just "Some girl!" She did not have the chiseled bisque-doll features of a film queen, but Nevin was about the only man she'd ever met who did not, consciously or unconsciously, try to hold her hand just a teeny second longer. No figurine from Tanagra could show a more exquisite body—nor much more frankly in bathing suit and evening gown—than this Daughter of Today, but in street-dress as now, slim, boyish straightness, matchless ankles.

After a greeting as comradely as Tim's, she sat there cross-legged in his one rocking-chair, saying she bet he was glad he wouldn't have to lie around much longer, and "I expect you'd like to give me a black eye, just for good measure, now wouldn't you?"

He laughed with her, not very wholeheartedly and she looked a little as if she didn't quite make him out and was puzzled by such an unheard-of impasse. Did he really value his collar-bone more than an introduction to Berry Lane! Astonishing. At least not to say it was worth it.

Springing to repair something, he hardly knew what, after all his carefulness he blundered horribly. "It was my own fault—not looking where I was going. You see the firm was sending me on rather an important trip, to Buenos Aires, and I was rushing around and—" Idiot! What was he blabbing that for!

She leaned forward. "You were! Nobody told me that." He had promised to kill Tim if he hinted it to her. "And you've been delayed all this time. Oh, I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Lashbrooke! Are you going, then, as soon as you're able?"

"Well—ah—no." Oh, he should certainly kick himself for that slip. "You see, somebody had to go right away, so they—of course they had to send another man."

His only hope now was to make her think it didn't matter. "There was no difficulty about that," he assured her lightly.

She was regarding him so thoughtfully that he squirmed. "I suppose not," she said. "But you—I can see you wanted to go."

"Why, I was glad to get out of it," he lied wildly. It was no use. He knew that with her infernal intuition she knew just as well as if he had told her, that it was his big chance, a chance that might have led to wonderful things. He had worked hard and he was twenty-eight. It was opportunity at last giving him a hope of getting his nose off the grindstone. Nobody had ever handed him anything on a silver platter and just as he had pulled himself up to take something well-earned, this girl who'd had everything handed to her brushed by and knocked the whole thing out of his hand. And now to his misery he perceived that she guessed it.

He had kept the bitterness of his disappointment even from Tim, and he had not even to himself coupled it with any other emotion. Now of a sudden he hated with fury this lying here weakly. He wanted, not in envy or revenge, but oh, he wanted fiercely their positions to be reversed—he saw himself, magnificent in his young strength, striding from some wreck or other, her limp figure in his arms—

With one of those quick, characteristic movements, she was at his side. "It was bad enough to hurt you without doing you a lot of other damage, too! Isn't there something I can do to fix it? Oh, please don't hesitate, if there is." She looked down at him half-expectantly, and he actually felt rising to his ridiculous tongue a hoarse, imperious whisper—"Only kiss me." He bit it off, to substitute: "Oh, come, you're making a mountain out of nothing. Please don't bother about it a bit more. It's all over and no eternal damage done."

It was as if he had pushed her away, but "I'm glad to hear that," she returned in the old cool assuredness. "We can shake hands, then, and part friends? Oh, don't get up."

He got to his slippered feet, though.

"You've been more than kind," he told her. "Please don't think me unappreciative." He was so formal, so very final about it. He took her hand, immediately released it.

"Good-by," she said. "Will you come to see me some time and let me know you've quite recovered?"

"Thank you, I'll be delighted to come."

She smiled back from the door looking directly into his eyes.

There was laughter in hers, whimsical challenge—and something else. "Good-by."

## II.

ON an evening three weeks or so later, he parked the little roadster he and Tim owned together in the Lane driveway and walked up to the elegant entrance. It was his first call and he had promised himself all the way out that it would be his last. He had not meant to see her again, but a few days before she had driven up alongside as he was walking home.

"Quite recovered, I see," she called gayly.

"Quite, thank you." Some commonplace, and then: "Aren't you coming to see me *at all*?"

So—here he was.

The Lane house stood on a hill-top, and Nevin looked out as over a tremendous diamond stomacher of glittering city, twinkling off into dark-blue distances. The great house towered over him, the wide gardens spread sweet and dim around it, and it all belonged to one girl—no old woman lives in this shoe—she has so much money she don't know what to do—A butler had opened the door.

Nevin was not shown into the drawing room, but into a smaller living-room, very tasteful, very comfortable, very charming. He was annoyed to have it occur to him that his yearly income would not pay for this one room's furnishings.

She came down at once, and after all, she was beautiful, wasn't she? No chaperon spoiled their tête-à-tête. Some old cousins of her mother's lived with her, he understood, but they did not presume to appear:

Enchanted night! And what were the



mad antics, the intoxications, the varied delights of this enchantment? Oh, they just talked. What about that was so engrossing? Oh—well—nothing special. And she sang a couple of songs from a new musical comedy she had seen in New York and read him some verses of Edna Millay's that she found delicious. That was all.

He would leave early, of course, so he looked at his watch after about three-quarters of an hour, and it was two minutes to twelve!

She came out on the veranda with him and stood there so slim and sweet in the spangled midnight, and it was so still and cool and there was no world about them really, no work nor money nor anxiety nor pride, there was only Berry Lane with bare arms on a hill-top. He must take her hand for good night, he must look into her moon-pale face, he must see her fresh lips part—must feel his own against them—

### III.

QUEEREST thing how you can just shoot through space—and queerer even how you got through it without hitting any solid objects until the squeal of brakes brought you plump against Mrs. Mac's garage. Nevin trod air around to the front door and was floating on upstairs when on the little stand in the hall he saw a letter addressed to him. It had been there doubtless when he came home to dress for his call, but his mail usually came to the office and he expected none here. Mrs. Mac had propped it up against a book so as to attract his attention.

It was from his mother. He had not told her of his accident until he was well, had then passed over it as of no consequence. This was her answer.

Mother and son usually kept house together. This winter, however, Mrs. Lashbrooke, called by the illness of her only sister, had gone to her in the little mid-Western city where Nevin was born. Giving up their little flat for economy's sake, Nevin had taken this room at Mrs. Mac-Allister's, and it would not be true to say that he had not enjoyed his freedom.

In his room he glanced through the letter,

knowing just what she would say—suddenly he registered attention, surprise.

Nevin, how wonderful for you to have met Miss Lane! And in this way that must surely interest her in you. I know she has never met a brighter, handsomer boy than *mine*. I have heard she has two millions in her own right, or is it ten?

There was more of the same. Nevin's eyes cooled, his mouth set. In her excitement mother had said, not more than she meant, but more than she would have discreetly admitted that she meant had she been talking to him. If it had been any other girl he would have laughed at dear silly mother wanting him to ensnare an heiress. This was different. And sillier.

For the next week his assiduous attention to his duties was almost painful. His entire business life had been spent in the employ of the Presswell Electric Appliance Company. He had entered it as the merest lad, given it his best. After the war he had marveled at his luck in getting the dear old job back. If since he was not advancing as rapidly as he wished, he consoled himself with the idea that it was a good place to hang on to anyway, aside from the fact that on account of mother he could afford to take no gambling chances. Old Mr. Presswell must retire before so very long. That meant reorganization, and with newer methods, a general speeding-up, the old firm should become a power in its line, should carry up with it all the faithful ones.

This morning, coming in from lunch, he ran into June Barker, old Mr. Presswell's stenographer.

"What's the matter? Trying to work yourself to death?" Her friendly eyes scrutinized him while she removed her hat and touched her hair here and there with nicely manicured fingers. She was a neat, fresh-looking girl, not exactly pretty, perhaps, a wholesome, efficient sort of person.

"Well, I have been busy," he said, and suddenly realized how completely he had forgotten June of late. He had been in the habit of seeing her quite frequently, of spending an occasional evening at her house, taking her to the movies or perhaps to call upon young friends, maybe for a ride out to

the beach on his nights to have the little car.

"Feeling all right again?"

"Oh, yes, surely." They had had good times together; it was a shame to neglect her as he had been doing. "We haven't been to a movie for a coon's age, have we? Want to go some night?"

A faint flush warmed her face. "Of course I do. 'Most any night."

"To-night?"

She nodded yes, smilingly.

"All right. Fine. We'll have a little dinner at Marie's, shall we?" She was obviously delighted.

He felt cheered up a bit. Come to think of it he had felt pretty dumpy lately. He had been more dashed about that Buenos Aires business than he cared to admit.

They made very merry at dinner. June was unusually animated, most appreciative of any little joke. Only once did she become the business woman for a moment. "Did you feel awfully bad about losing out on that Buenos Aires trip?" she asked.

"Oh—not so bad," he fenced. "It was a good chance, but well, it couldn't be helped."

"Maybe I shouldn't mention this, Nevin." She looked at him gravely. "You know we've expected old Mr. Presswell to retire before another hundred years. Well, quite a few things have happened lately that make me think it's going to happen sooner."

He was interested. "Is that so?"

"Yes. Now, of course, I don't mean anything definite, but things have been said that gave me a hunch. You know I believe if they found a buyer, the Presswells would sell out."

He stared at her earnest little face. That the old firm would really change hands had never been thought of. That would make a tremendous difference to everybody. No guessing all it might mean.

"Nothing to worry about, anyway," said June. "It might mean bigger things. I just thought I'd tell you, Nevin."

"Thanks," he said slowly. Years of service might mean nothing to new people—Oh, well, sure enough, no use worrying about something that hadn't happened yet.

They came out of the restaurant into such a delicious twilight that June protested against going into the theater at once. "Let's ride out a way, and then maybe we'll run across some neighborhood bill that we'd like to see."

He agreed, and presently headed the little car toward the sea. But at Western and Wilshire there was a bad traffic jam. Somebody had rammed a bumper under somebody's fender, and the halted motors, according to their short-sighted custom, nosed into every space and so stopped all progress. Nevin's little car drew in alongside a limousine whose uniformed chauffeur eyed him with hauteur.

"Oh, look!" June whispered. "Isn't that Berry Lane?"

He had already seen her. Yes, wrapped in an elaborate evening-coat that opened a little at the throat revealing a hint of décolleté, sitting beside a young man in a dinner-jacket whose head was turned interestedly toward her—Miss Beresford Lane.

Yes, he had already seen her, and she had seen him. And just as he saw without looking at them, the big car and the smart young man and the pearls around her neck, she saw the little car and the nice girl and the content of her face.

Their eyes met. She bowed and smiled, he bowed and smiled. The big car darted easily forward and left the little one behind.

Nevin became very intent on his driving, and they had gone several blocks before June spoke either. "I know that chap, too. It's Billy Deming. His father's president of the Security Trust where I used to work."

"Yes?" said Nevin.

"He's quite a nice fellow," she went on casually. "I mean likable, but a good deal of a cake-eater, I guess. Maybe he'll marry Miss Lane though, and won't ever have to work."

"Probably."

"I've wondered about those marriages. It's considered so romantic for a poor girl to marry a rich man I don't know why it seems some way sordid for a poor man to marry a rich girl. If it's all right for a rich man to buy the girl he wants, it ought to be all right for a rich girl to buy the man

she wants! That's equality, isn't it?" she laughed. She was making conversation, not knowing exactly why it needed making.

"Ought to work both ways," said Nevin.

"Somebody ought to make a comedy about it, like these, about the millionaire that marries the shopgirl and his set snubs her. That one's been done to death."

"Ought to make a good comedy," judged Nevin.

June, for no reason, sighed. "Well, I suppose a girl like Berry Lane can have any man she wants, rich or poor. Seems to me, though, if I had everything and had been everywhere and seen oodles of men, I wouldn't want Billy Deming."

"Think not?" said Nevin. Then they changed the subject, but he had wanted to ask why June thought Berry Lane could have any man she wanted.

On the second morning he received this note:

DEAR MR. LASHBROOKE:

I'm having some friends in Friday evening, and I'd like to have you drop in if you've nothing better to do. Not a party. Do, please come.

Sincerely,

BERRISFORD LANE.

Why in thunder should he want to waste a good evening with a lot of dolls and willy-boys? He certainly did not want to. He'd send his regrets. Spent all Wednesday evening composing and revising same. Spent his spare time Thursday and Friday buying a new dinner-jacket and new shirts and collars. Decided Friday night as he was shaving that he would phone unexpected business—sorry he'd be unable to make it. At eight thirty sharp he drove up the Lane driveway in a taxi, it being Tim's night to use the "boat."

June would have called it a party. There were six couples besides Nevin and Berry, not that there was any reason for such arbitrary pairing, since it seemed that two or three of the girls had come together. They sang and danced and ate and flirted. One of the girls, a Miss Wellworth, called for some inexplicable reason "Bumps," made eyes at Nevin. They all seemed to know that Nevin was the smashee of Berry's "smash," and there were a good

many jokes about it. "Why, I'm having a good time," he was surprised to discover.

He danced with Berry. He did not have much to say to her, and she did not chatter through the dance like the other girls. For one thing he just danced with these other girls—and he was conscious of having Berry Lane in his arms.

Once she said mischievously: "June is a sweet girl, isn't she?"

"What do you know about June?"

His surprise seemed to amuse her. "Oh, Billy told me the other night. I think he is a little sweet on her himself."

Nevin made ready to go when the others did, remarking Billy Deming lingering in the background. "I've had an awfully good time," he said to Berry.

"I'm glad. But I suppose you'll never call me up or come again unless you're dragged," she smiled. Maybe she did not know that he was thinking of the last time he was here. Certainly she gave no sign that she remembered it. Miss Wellworth put a hand on his arm and began to chatter about a party she was going to have.

In the confusion no one noticed that he had no car and he had not called a taxi, so presently he was walking down sedately to the nearest car line. Not floating as on that former occasion; no, to-night, his feet were on the ground.

"I'm falling in love with her," he admitted now honestly. "And I've got to stop it before I'm hurt like the devil. There's nothing in playing with this set for a fellow like me. I haven't time and I haven't the money. It's simply bad business. How could I marry a girl like that? And she would never think of marrying me anyway. It's all play with her. I'm new and those were cozy little talks we had when I was laid up there, and she has nothing else to do. It's just play for her, but it will be hell for me if I don't pull up."

He had not noticed the car line when he came to it, just kept on walking. It was three o'clock when he stole upstairs at Mrs. Mac's. But that good lady cocked an ear in spite of his caution. "My land, this is the first time that boy hasn't been in by twelve. I hope he ain't gettin' into mischief now his ma's away."

He could have told her he was doing his best, and he was pretty full of the struggle next day when, as he was leaving after a little conference with Mr. Presswell, the latter stopped him.

"By the way, Lasbrooke, I know you were disappointed about the South American trip. You've been pretty loyal to us, and I'd like to see you get on. Now this is strictly between ourselves. This business may, I say *may*, pass into other hands."

"Oh—" Nevin's eyes widened.

"In such an event," continued the old gentleman, "I want to say that you, among others, will be recommended highly to the new owners."

"Thank you very much," said Nevin. But his heart sank. The Presswells were simply going to "pass the buck." Any new owner would as likely as not consider the old Presswell men dead wood. After all, what did it matter? What did anything matter?

As she had predicted, he did not communicate with Berry Lane, but he took June to the theater, picking the first Western performance of a popular Eastern play. Everybody would be there. They were. She sat two rows in front and to Nevin's left, and between acts she saw him and spoke sweetly.

"We're always running into her, aren't we?" June giggled. "Got another cavalier to-night, I see. Goodness, the money those girls spend on clothes!" She went on in her chatty way. "Just look at her wrap—five thousand dollars if it cost a cent. And just think of the families that haven't got that a year. Why, I don't know a young married couple that have more than twenty-five hundred, and most of them have babies, too."

Nevin had three thousand. He mumbled something and moved uneasily. All of a sudden he was struck by June's look of satisfaction. He had not been really thinking of her at all, but this attention had pleased her. She had said how extravagant he was to buy these seats—she liked the balcony perfectly well. Nevertheless she regarded that extravagance as a subtle compliment.

What was he doing? He liked June.

She was nice, jolly little pal. A girl like June would marry a man and keep house gayly and efficiently on whatever he had. That's what he'd do if he had any sense—marry some girl like June. It would be so suitable.

The house darkened and he watched to see if the footlights might not cast a golden reflection on the face of Berry Lane. June relaxed contentedly beside him.

#### IV.

THE deal had gone through. The holdings of the Presswell Company had passed completely into the hands of the Great Western Electric Company. The excitement, the ill-concealed anxiety of the Presswell employees was heightened by the mystery surrounding the whole transaction. Nobody had ever heard of the Great Western. It was a brand new concern. Wild rumors about it came from every direction. It was pretty generally conceded that the Great Western had walked in at the last moment and by an enormous cash payment taken the thing right away from the original negotiators.

Nevin did not understand his own indifference in what was surely a crisis in his life. If the Great Western did not want him, he guessed he could get a job somewhere. About the only feeling he had about it was that of relief that his mother wasn't there to worry.

Then an amazing letter, from which this paragraph stood out as if written in red

In connection with the taking over by the Great Western Electric Company of the Presswell Works, the undersigned desire to consult with you upon a matter of great importance to yourself.

And there was the signature of Blessington & Burbage, the biggest lawyers in town, through whom the Presswell transaction had been handled. Nevin could hardly believe his eyes. Why, this is *wild*. Blessington & Burbage! Consulting with an insignificant underling like himself! It must be a mistake. It *must* be.

Mention of Blessington & Burbage obtained instant permission to answer their call.

Mr. Burbage received him cordially. Some preliminary generalities about high recommendations from the retiring company. He would understand that Mr. Burbage was merely acting as agent for the Great Western, which was prepared to install Mr. Lashbrooke as *general manager of the new company!*

This was one of those fantastic ones. Nevin couldn't remember having eaten anything special—funny what made you dream these absurd situations. This one was on a par with riding around on a whale picking daisies. He smiled, and waited to wake up.

Mr. Burbage smiled back. "You're pretty young, of course," he said, "but I understand you've practically grown up with the Presswells and know the business from the ground up. It should be a wonderful opportunity to show what young blood and ideas can do."

Nevin's eyes kindled, his jaw set. "Oh, I can do it! But—but—" He fell back into bewilderment. Rubbed his forehead, would have pinched himself but for Mr. Burbage's steady gaze. "But I don't understand Mr. Burbage! There's no sense to it. Why should the Great Western—why, they don't *know me*. I haven't the slightest notion as to a single person connected with the Great Western. I can't imagine business—big business men—electing a young fellow like me in this offhand way. I don't say I'm not competent. I can swing it all right. I know I can do that, but how do *they* know it—the men who have put their good money into this deal?"

Mr. Burbage smiled again, and it seemed to Nevin that his smile had grown a bit knowing. "Your curiosity is pardonable. Mr. Lashbrooke," said he, "and entirely understandable in a young man of your evident good sense. I can only say this, that the Great Western is owned by one person, that final decision lies with that one person, and that one person has elected to name you manager of the business formerly known as the Presswell Company."

Nevin stared at him. "And this person is—"

Mr. Burbage made a little gesture. "Un-

known. I am not supposed to impart to you even the small information I have."

"It seems a very unnecessary mystery," Nevin protested. "I don't see any use in it, and frankly, I don't like it. If this person can trust me with the management of a big investment like this, it seems to me I could be trusted with his name. To whom am I responsible? Who is going to keep tab on my management?"

"Mr. Lashbrooke, aren't you subjecting the goose who laid the golden egg to an ungrateful scrutiny?" Burbage's small eyes twinkled. "Reports will be made to us, acting as business agents for our client."

Nevin found it necessary to apply his handkerchief to his forehead.

"It did seem to me," continued Mr. Burbage, and there appeared to be no obvious reason why he should enjoy it so much, "that this was a terrible tax on any young man's curiosity. However, there's no law against putting two and two together, and—" The telephone rang and Mr. Burbage replied, "Oh, yes," to some inquiry. "I have it here." He opened a drawer and took out a paper evidently notes, from which he read some items.

"He acts as if he thought I *did* know and was only pretending ignorance," Nevin puzzled. "He acts as if I were just keeping up some sort of game. Looks as if he might wink at me any minute!" His glance fell wholly by chance upon that open drawer and upon a document that lay uppermost among its contents. There was a black signature scrawled across it and there was something familiar about that black signature. Then it fairly leaped at him—

#### BERESFORD LANE

Mr. Burbage hung up the receiver, closed the drawer, and as he swung around again in his chair, the slightly knowing smile was returning to his lips. Nevin, with a face like chalk, was already upon his feet.

"Please inform your client, Mr. Burbage, that I am resigning to-day from the Presswell Company, and that I am not open to any offer whatever from the Great Western. Thank you."

"But, my dear boy!" gasped Burbage.

"Good morning," said Lashbrooke.

Of course, the fact that Blessington and Burbage might be Beresford Lane's lawyers meant nothing. There was not the slightest reason in the world to think that she—But he *knew* it. Just as well as he knew anything, he knew that Beresford Lane had done this.

Even so what was he so furious about? In all the Cinderella stories didn't the prince tactfully see that Cinderella had all the accessories, the proper gowns and bats and jewels before he presented her in his marble halls? And wasn't she properly grateful and think it was just sweet of him? Then if, situations being reversed, the princess tactfully bought a little two or three million dollar business for her Cinders so that he would be suitably equipped for her circles, why should Cinders be in such a towering rage?

She just wanted him for a plaything—God knows why!—and to gratify any little whim like that she was willing to spend a million or so. Oh, he saw clearly enough that the only reason she did this was because he had piqued her vanity by not following up the opportunity for a flirtation. And if he had weakly told her what she had aroused in him, she would have laughed and gone off to Paris or China or— Oh, he knew the breed. "Overcharged." She wanted him to know her power.

What a fool he had made of himself. He should have accepted blandly and gone out and married June! If she would have him. He knew now why men got drunk in the days when it was handy. He tried to pull himself together. He knew he wasn't thinking straight, couldn't think straight just yet. What a thing to happen!

He had just been rushing on, now he turned and went back to the Presswell office. He wasn't so mad now, merely dazed, as if he had been hit a tremendous wallop and hadn't got back much of a sense of direction. He sat down at his desk, fumbled with things, pretended to be busy. When his phone rang presently, he answered mechanically.

"Mr. Lashbrooke?" It was a low, quiet voice, so very low and quiet and charged with something that suggested nothing less potent than TNT.

"Yes," he replied as quietly.

"This is Beresford Lane."

"Yes, Miss Lane."

"I have something to say to you. Something rather important. Could you see me soon? I'm downtown now. Could you meet me some place?"

"I suppose I could, if it's very important." His voice was perfectly level.

"It is. If you will be downstairs in ten minutes, I'll drive by and pick you up."

"Very well. Thank you."

"Thank you." She hung up.

He took his hat again and went downstairs past busy men at desks. What was their business to him? At last he was his own man. Yes, he was out of a job. This business into which he had put brain and heart and hands—all right, this is the end of that.

He thought he knew what had happened. Burbage had immediately notified Berry of Nevin's action, and Burbage had been so sure in his own mind that Nevin could not but know the identity of his client that he had doubtless told Berry that Nevin knew. Burbage, too, in looking back for some clew to Nevin's emotional exit would surely remember the opened drawer and discover what had been made visible by his own withdrawal of the upper note-sheet. He would recall his "two and two—"

Berry drew into the curb in the same car with which she had violently made young Mr. Lashbrooke's acquaintance. She was a little pale and she nodded with no smile to his lifted hat.

He sat beside her stonily while she threaded traffic. Finally she slipped into a quieter street and she began—straight from the shoulder. "Why did you refuse to become manager of the new company?"

"How do you know I refused?" he inquired ironically.

"Burbage phoned me—fatuous old blockhead!" Burbage had undoubtedly received *his* full quota.

"It seems strange that Mr. Burbage should notify *you* of my refusal," Nevin drawled.

"Let's be frank," she urged curtly.

"It hasn't seemed your specialty," suggested Nevin.

She bit her lip, after a moment, went on: "Please tell me why you would not accept such an opportunity."

"It was my privilege to refuse it."

"But wasn't it a big opportunity for any young man?" This more gently.

"Wonderful, of course."

"And if it had come from a Great Western Company—of men," she persisted, "you would have been delighted to accept it?"

"Very likely."

"That's why I tried to stay out of sight," she said. "It wasn't possible not to."

"I don't see what put such an idea in your head!" he groaned.

"I felt it was my fault that you lost the South American trip. I heard the Presswell Company was selling out, and I had Burbage investigate. I learned that the purchasing company would not advance you, although it would probably retain the South American man and make that an important unit. I wanted to make it up to you."

"So you bought the whole works, like a rocking-horse for the baby?"

They were getting out of town now. The speedometer whirled up to forty-five under the urge of her foot, dropped back slowly to a lawful thirty. "I don't see why it should make such a difference to you who happened to own the old thing." Her voice was not so steady as it had been.

"Well, it does make a difference."

"You mean you wouldn't work for me if it was the last place in the world, I suppose," she cried angrily.

"Put it any way you like."

"I thought we could be friends."

"Well, we can't," he said drearily.

"Oh, you're hateful!" she flung at him. "And I've humbled myself this way!"

"Humbled me, you mean."

She turned on him like a little cat all claws. "I could have made you want me—so much that you couldn't resist! But I *wouldn't!* I wanted—" She stopped as short as she had stopped the car, and turned her face from him.

"All right," he answered in a low voice. "You could. You can buy and have everything in the world, can't you? You always

have, and you can't understand anything else."

"I'm sorry I said that," she murmured.

"I knew all along it was just that," he went on. "You only wanted to put your mark on me. Because you were sure it was your divine prerogative to put it wherever you fancied. I don't see why you should begrudge me a little self-respect."

"Oh, *damn* it!" she groaned out with a sob.

A terrible sadness ached in his throat. Beyond the red-headed pepper-trees, the brown hills were dressing in green, a meadow-lark called liquidly, mocking-birds caroled their satisfaction with Earth.

If only this were all the world, and there was no money and no pride and no bitterness—oh, if this were all the world.

"And you, my sweet Penelope, out there somewhere you wait for me, 'With buds of roses in your hair and kisses on your mouth.'"

Oh, to be alone in such a world, not with you, Penelope, but with Berry Lane. Our little lives are almost as short as the butterflies'. What is the good of all the rest, if we let our only love go by?

Something took his proudful arms and put them around her and turned her face to his and his lips found hers. They pressed his fiercely, and when he looked at her, tears showed on her lashes.

Then she sat up. "Now that you've punished me properly. I suppose you'll go and marry June—June, June, that you're such pals with!"

He laughed rapturously. "Do you think I will?" he whispered. "It is so sweet to be silly."

"Well," said Beresford Lane, "I've run over you and after you and cried over you and moved heaven and earth to get you, and you're bought and paid for, and I don't think you will."

"Darling! If you're not good when we're married, I'll remind you of that."

"Don't you dare! And another thing I'd like to have settled while we're settling things. Are you or are you not the manager of the Great Western Electric Company?"

"Yes, dear," said he with mock meekness, "I am."



# The Black Jarl

By **JOHNSTON McCULLEY**

*Author of "The Mark of Zorro," "Hooked," etc.*

## CHAPTER X.

### THE HOUSE OF HARALD.

**S**OON after the coming of the dawn, Svend the Bloody gave the sign for departure.

Out along the forest trail they rode, Svend and Magnus in the lead, and Edvard Haakonsson riding but a pace behind them. Cheering thralls urged them on their way. It was a splendid company, the pick of Svend's warriors, with their best armor and weapons, a handful of his most beautiful shield maidens led by Brynhild, and thralls in fresh kirtles—the best and strongest and most handsome thralls.

Those left behind looked upon the departure with varying emotions, for all of them would have gone. Some of them, notably the men-at-arms, expected to go shortly,

since there had been whisperings, and one of Magnus's most trusted men had been left behind in command. Even Rolf, the stolid shipmaster, gave evidences of excitement and breathed like an old war horse, which was unusual in itself.

The march was taken leisurely and in comfort through the cool woods. And when the dusk came the company was within a short distance of Harald's house. They camped in the dark forest aisles, building huge fires and roasting meat. No tent was pitched save that of Svend, for the others chose to sleep on the ground, on couches of pine needles.

Again they were up at dawn. Svend sent two men ahead to announce their approach to Harald, and then gave commands that everything be put in condition for a proper showing. Wherefore, weapons were

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scoured again and secretly sharpened, helmets were burnished, and armor newly rubbed.

The bright sun was high in the heavens when finally they came to the great clearing before the house of Harald the Just. The gates and doors stood wide open. Thralls in holiday attire ran among the buildings. Gay banners had been flung from the walls. Svend the Bloody led his gallant company to within a short distance of the gates, and there he stopped and waited. Harald the Just came forth to greet him, his men at his back. Svend dismounted and walked slowly forward, his face inscrutable, Magnus stalking at his side.

"Hail, Svend!" cried Harald the Just, raising his hand. "Hail Svend, my neighbor!"

"Hail!" Svend replied.

"Do you come in peace or war?"

Svend seemed to hesitate a moment at the question, but only for a moment. He was committed to this nefarious enterprise, and he could not retreat now.

"We come in peace!" he said.

"Then is my house yours, Svend the Bloody! Enter, and order as you will, and your company with you. Your maidens will be greeted by those of my household, your warriors by mine. There is food for your thralls, and places of rest. This evening we feast!"

Now there was a tumult as Svend's company dismounted and thralls led the horses away. Men-at-arms pretended a friendship that they scarcely felt. Though their words were fair when they mingled, yet they watched one another closely, for the two houses had long been enemies, and such things are not forgotten in the passing of a few days.

Edvard Haakonsson entered the great hall with Svend and the others, and Harald turned for a moment to greet him particularly. The Ax Thrower chafed because he was compelled by courtesy to stand there with the others and exchange meaningless phrases. It was Thyra his eyes sought, and none other.

He glanced around the great room, at its giant fireplace, its long tables already placed for the evening feast. Toward one end

there was a short flight of stone steps that led up to a landing and a heavy door. Edvard Haakonsson sensed that this led to the women's quarters, and that Thyra's room was there.

Yet it was quite some time before he saw her. Svend and his men were assigned to quarters, and mingled with Harald's men. Svend and Magnus retired as though to wash the dust of the journey from their hands and faces, but in reality to whisper more of the plot.

"The men were to have left a short time behind us, jarl, and to have passed the night in the woods," Magnus said. "They will be at the edge of the forest by nightfall, or a little before."

"Some straying thrall of Harald's may see them and give the alarm."

"Any straying thrall who sees them will see nothing more on this earth," Magnus growled. "I have given orders covering everything."

"You have planned the signal?"

"I have, jarl. When you signal to me, then will I pass the signal on to the others. When we strike here in Harald's house, the men in the woods will rush in before Harald and his men-at-arms realize what is happening."

"Make certain that you forget nothing," Svend directed. "And Brynhild must be warned at the proper moment, so that the maidens may rush out of harm's way. This is an enterprise in which we must win or die! Great Thor, give us strength!"

"Brynhild shall be warned."

"And—my kinsman—"

"I shall attend to the black jarl," Magnus promised, his face growing suddenly dark. "Between Edvard Haakonsson and myself there is a blood feud."

"Why?" Svend demanded. "For reasons other than mine?"

"Brynhild!" Magnus said.

"Ha! You want the maiden? Then you shall have her, Magnus, when this business is at an end!"

Down in the great hall Edvard the Ax Thrower had been greeting men, but meantime making his way slowly along the wall and toward the landing he had seen. And after a time the door at the top of the

flight of steps was opened slowly, and Thyra stepped out.

For a moment she stood looking down at the scene of confusion, then she caught sight of the Ax Thrower, and her face flushed and her eyes glistened. Her hands clutched at her breast, which rose and fell with emotion. And then she slowly descended toward him, and he went forward to greet her.

"Thyra!" he breathed.

"Edvard! My Ax Thrower!"

"All is well with you?"

"All is well," she replied.

"I have been counting the days."

"And I also," she whispered. "I am going to feed my hounds. You may come with me."

It was a clever subterfuge to get alone with him, and he realized it. Across the great hall they went, men bowing before him and the jarl's daughter. Out into the open they walked, where Thyra beckoned some thralls and bade them fetch meat. And so they went to one end of the great building, where a pack of hounds waited.

She left him for a moment, took chunks of meat from the thralls, and walked out among the hounds. They leaped around her, but only in play. They sprang back when she commanded them, and waited until she tossed the meat.

All but one of the thralls retired, and Thyra walked back to Edvard's side.

"It seems the lifetime of a man since I have seen you," he said.

"It seems long to me, too."

"Is this the time to speak to your father?"

"We must wait," she said. "A little longer must we keep our love a secret. Wait until my father is sure that Svend the Bloody means sincere friendship. But do you be with my father as much as it is possible, and teach him to trust you. Perhaps, before you go away again, the word may be said."

She looked up at him with love shining in her eyes, and he would have kissed her had he been sure that no one would have seen. For a moment he did hold her hand.

But they were not alone in the world. Not that the thrall mattered, for he was not

to be taken into consideration, but there was another who watched with eyes flaming in hate.

Brynhild had seen Edvard Haakonsson greet Thyra, and had been watching him before the greeting. Her woman's intuition told her the truth. And when they left the house she followed at a little distance, though careful not to be seen by them. And she was standing at the corner of the great house now, watching the love light as it danced in their eyes. A moment she watched, then turned swiftly, her face black with rage, and reentered the great hall.

Magnus came from his visit with Svend, and the shield maiden claimed his ear.

"The black jarl is in love with Harald's daughter," she whispered. "I have been watching them. He prefers that white face to me!"

"They are of a kind—small and soft," Magnus replied. "As we are of a kind—big and strong."

"That he turns from me to her!"

"Yet is your revenge near," Magnus whispered. "Already I have spoken to Svend, and he has promised me your hand. And before the sun rises again I shall have claimed it."

"You mean—"

"That Edvard Haakonsson never will wed the jarl's daughter—or any other woman," Magnus said. "At a later time I shall tell you more. Be near me, and watch me closely, when the feast begins!"

She nodded assent, and Magnus walked away. And through the door came Edvard and Thyra again, and they stopped at the bottom of the flight of stone steps, and for a moment whispered together. Then the jarl's daughter hurried up to her room, while Edvard Haakonsson, his face radiant, turned aside to mingle with the men.

## CHAPTER XI.

### WITCH'S BREW.

THROUGHOUT the remainder of the day great preparations were made for the big feast that was to cement a friendship. Harald the Just entertained Svend in his own quarters, while his lieu-

tenants made sure that everything was in readiness.

The warriors mingled, tried tests of skill, played at rough sports, and bathed in the stream at the back of Harald's house. The shield maidens gossiped and rested. Svend's thralls aided their brothers of the household of Harald, stealing scraps of food when they could. None knew better than the thralls the glory of a great feast.

In her own room Thyra consulted with Solveig, her old nurse.

Solveig was a wrinkled hag of uncertain years, a daughter of thralls. But she had been selected as nurse when Thyra's mother had died and Harald had refused to wed again. And between the jarl's daughter and the wrinkled nurse was a love that was deep and understanding.

And now, as to a mother, Thyra went to Solveig, and with flaming cheeks and bright eyes confessed her secret. The ancient nurse grunted and sat in a corner of the room, rocking back and forth on her heels. After a time she went to the fireplace and threw sticks on the fire, and squatted there and peered into the flames.

"What do you see, Solveig?" Thyra asked, kneeling beside her.

"His love is good," the nurse grunted.

"I give you thanks for those sweet words."

"But there will be trouble."

"Trouble?" Thyra gasped.

"Danger! Blood will flow!"

Thyra stopped her with a cry. "Solveig, you frighten me!" she said.

"I read it in the flames, jarl's daughter."

"And what else?"

"I cannot see well. But his love is good, though danger will come."

"Danger to him?"

"I cannot tell. It is growing dark," the old nurse said, and got up and left the fireplace.

Thyra, the jarl's daughter, paced around the room. The words of the nurse had troubled her. She was a Christian, yet had not entirely shaken herself free of witch lore. And old Solveig many times had spoken of things that were to happen, and they did.

For a time she was quiet with her trou-

bles; then she opened the door and looked down into the great hall. Edvard Haakonsson was not far away, and when she descended the steps he hurried forward to join her. Brynhild saw them, and slipped near. Crouching at the side of the steps, she could hear.

"Beloved!" Edvard whispered.

"I am troubled, Ax Thrower," Thyra said. "My nurse can look into the future. She has looked this day. She says that your love is good—but that there is danger near."

"Danger?" he repeated.

"Grave danger, from her manner. She told me that blood will flow. I asked her whether the danger was to you, but she could not tell."

"Do not let her words trouble you."

"But they do, Edvard, and I cannot help it. I fear for you so. Attend, beloved! Near the house lives a witch, an old hag who has the gift, men say. I—I cannot believe in such things, yet she has some wonderful power. If you could see her, perhaps she could tell you more."

"You would have me visit a witch—you, a Christian?"

"Only that we may look into the future for love's sake," she whispered in reply. "That is not the same thing as having her brew confusion to your enemies. You follow the forest trail, Ax Thrower, and after a time you come to a stream. Her hut is beside the stream. It is not a long distance. You could return in time for the feast."

A moment he looked at her, then he smiled.

"It is a command, Thyra," he said. "I go at once. And do you return to your nurse, and not worry about this business."

She glided back up the steps, and Edvard Haakonsson hurried from the great hall. Brynhild searched until she found Magnus, and called him aside. She spoke rapidly and in whispers.

"He has walked into my hands," Magnus said. "I'll attend to him."

But Magnus was troubled as he hurried away to call one of his trusted men-at-arms. For the warriors even now should be approaching through the woods, and Edvard Haakonsson might meet them. Then

would the fat be in the fire. So Magnus gave his trusted man orders, and the fellow left the house and made his way slowly to the edge of the forest. And when he had reached it he plunged from sight to seek those coming from Svend's place.

Edvard the Ax Thrower found the end of the forest trail and made his way along it rapidly. It was no more than a leafy tunnel, the bottom worn smooth by the feet of thralls. Soon he was in the stillness of the deep woods, where there was naught to be heard save the whispering of the wind through the trees and sounds from forest life.

On he went, and presently he reached the stream. He found the witch's hut half hidden by hrush, and approached it slowly. There was a fire before it, and over the fire a large pot, but the door of the hut was closed and there was no human to be seen.

Edvard hesitated a moment, and then went up to the door. He took his dagger out of his girdle and pounded upon the door with the hilt of the weapon. A croaking voice sounded behind him.

"What does the jarl wish?" it asked.

Edvard Haakonsson whirled at the sound. The witch had slipped from the woods, and now stood beside the boiling pot, her thin hair stringing down from her head, her bent body supported by a crooked stick. She leaned forward and tilted her wrinkled chin, and her tiny eyes gleamed at him.

"What does the black jarl wish?" she asked. "Never have I seen you before, yet I knew that you would come."

"How did you know that?" Edvard asked.

"Old Dagmar knows many things that other folks do not. If you have nothing to ask of me, go your way."

"If you know so much," Edvard said, "perhaps you know what knowledge I seek without me telling you."

"You would look into the future," she said.

"And can you show it me?"

"If the eyes of the jarl are good, perchance he can see for himself."

Edvard started toward the boiling pot,

but she threw up her crooked stick and stopped him.

"Is there no reward?" she demanded.

The Ax Thrower laughed and gave a bracelet from his arm. The old hag cackled, drew back the stick, and motioned toward the pot.

Edvard drew nearer and looked down at the steaming mess.

"Closer!" Dagmar whispered. "Look closer, jarl! The future may be seen only by those who wish to see it."

"I see nothing but boiling stuff covered with a scum."

"Look well at the scum, jarl!" The old witch was beside him now, hending forward. "Look, jarl! You love a maid, but she soon will be in peril. You must fight to protect her. Look again, jarl! There is blood in the air. There is strife abroad. Before the night is over, men will die. Your own life is threatened, and that of the maid you love."

Edvard Haakonsson gave a cry and covered his eyes with his arm. Whether he saw it or not, he believed that he did. He bent forward again and looked at the foaming stuff in the pot.

"Beware those you think are your friends!" the old hag croaked. "Put not your trust in any man during the night that is coming. Even now the forces of evil are gathering. Guard well yourself and the maid you love."

"Tell me more!" he commanded.

"I cannot tell you what is not shown, jarl. Sharpen your ax. I can tell you that much—sharpen your ax!"

"More!" he commanded again, looking at the scum in the pot.

"Then, look, jarl."

"I see nothing."

"That is because you cannot read. Let Dagmar read it for you. Jarl you are now, in your own right. Doubt jarl you may be soon."

"What is the meaning of that?"

"Ruler over two jarldoms," she said.

"That is all, mighty one!"

He backed away from the pot, looked at her, then whirled and darted back along the forest trail. He felt forced to believe. Ruler over two jarldoms! Did that mean

his own and the jarldom of Harald the Just? Was Thyra's father to be slain, and he to rule by virtue of marriage with Harald's daughter?

Dagmar predicted strife. Did she mean that Svend would break the law of hospitality and commence an attack? But he put aside that thought as unworthy. Perhaps the danger to himself would come from personal enemies, he thought. And she might have meant that he would rule over two jarldoms after Svend's death, as was to be expected if he outlived Svend.

He hurried along the trail, his head bent on his chest. It was almost dark now, and soon the feast would begin, and he had to be there for that, and wanted a private word with Thyra first. He sprang across a brook, darted over rocks, and once more followed the well worn trail.

And suddenly men sprang out at him, overwhelmed him, and made him prisoner before he could reach his dagger. Then he was pulled back into the brush, still struggling and trying to fight. A skin was thrown over his head, half smothering him, blinding him.

"Fiends!" he gasped. "What treachery is this?"

But the skin over his head muffled his voice.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MASKS REMOVED.

**H**IS captors held him fast upon the ground while they lashed his ankles with thongs and fastened his wrists behind his back. And then they lifted him and carried him for a distance through the woods, and finally put him down again. He could hear the whisperings of many men and the crackling of burning twigs—could feel the heat of a small fire.

He twisted and struggled, and after a time one of the men went forward and whipped the skin from around his head. Edvard Haakonson whirled to one side and managed to sit up against the bole of a tree.

"What means this treachery?" he demanded.

In the semigloom he could see nothing at first, save the dusky and uncertain forms of moving men. That they were warriors he saw at a glance, for axes flashed in the reflection from the fire, and he saw shields and spears and bows.

None of them gave him answer. He rested for a moment and then managed to get to his feet, and there he leaned against the tree and tugged at his bonds, to find that his captors had done their work well indeed.

"What means this?" he demanded once more.

A man stepped up beside him, and Edvard saw in surprise that he was one of Svend's warriors, a lieutenant who had been left behind at Svend's house.

"We have but obeyed orders, jarl," he said. "Do not hold it against us."

"What orders? And who are these men? What do you here?"

"One comes who will tell you all," the warrior replied.

"You were told so to take me?"

"We were so told, jarl; commanded to make a captive of you as you came back through the woods."

"Loose me instantly!" Edvard commanded. "Whose orders can be greater than mine?"

"Svend is our jarl."

"Then these orders came from Svend?" Edvard asked in surprise.

"Not from Svend, perhaps, but with his sanction," the warrior replied. "One will come soon to explain it all."

Edvard thought on that for a moment, but he was not compelled to think for long. A guard called a low-voiced warning and was answered, and Magnus strode into the little clearing by the fire.

"Magnus!" There was venom in Edvard's voice now. "What means this treachery?"

Magnus leered at him and stood close, his fists braced against his hips.

"It is by Svend's permission," he said.

"Why am I taken captive like an enemy?" Edvard demanded. "Did you issue the order?"

"I did, jarl!"

"By what authority?"

"By the permission of Svend the Bloody, I have said."

"What means it?"

"Now we come to the question," Magnus declared, stepping a pace closer.

"I demand an answer!"

"It is unusual for a prisoner to demand, but under the circumstances, I am disposed to reply," Magnus said. His words and manner were without respect, yet he felt sure of his ground now. "You saw fit to take a stroll through the woods. It was intended that you should remain in the big house. For, strolling through the woods, you met with something of which you should not have known—these good warriors of Svend's."

"What means their presence here?"

"Can you not guess?" Magnus asked.

"Did you think that Svend the Bloody meant to cement friendship with Harald the Just? This kind invitation of Harald's for a visit but opened the way."

"You mean treachery?" Edvard gasped.

"I mean that when the feast begins, jarl, a signal will be given. And then our men in the house, and these of our forces outside will rush to combat and work their will upon Harald and his place."

"You mean an attack?"

"More than that, jarl—a victory for Odin and Thor! You were not told, because Svend feared to trust you, and with good reason, it seems. For you have looked upon Harald's daughter with eyes of love. One has observed you. Even now you have been paying a visit to some witch at her command. You might take it amiss that Svend slay Harald and wreck his house. Love oftentimes makes a fool of a man and causes him to forget his kin."

"And would I want to forget my kinsman if he did such a thing!" Edvard Haakonson declared, hotly. "Does not Svend know the laws of hospitality?"

"He is big enough man to break them, when it serves his purpose to do so," Magnus said.

"No man is big enough to do that," the black jarl declared. "Loose me!"

"It is not time," Magnus said.

"What mean you?"

"To Thor shall be the victory! And

every good soldier knows the value of surprise. You love the maid, and your heart is not in our plans. Were you to be freed, you might rush to the house of Harald and give the alarm!"

"It is true that I might."

"So here you remain, a prisoner, until the signal for attack is given. Then you will be freed and may join in the battle. But our plans cannot be wrecked when they have gone so far."

"I shall hold you to account for this!"

"When Thor triumphs, then I shall be at your service, jarl! I return now to the house. Rest easy in your bonds, for the signal soon will be given."

Without another word Magnus turned his back disrespectfully and disappeared in the darkness.

Once more Edvard Haakonson tugged at his bonds and knew that he could not win free. He slumped down to the ground against the bole of the tree. The others gave him scant attention, seemingly afraid to approach. But they watched him from a little distance, to see that he did not escape.

And now the horror of the thing claimed him, and he knew what the witch had meant. Svend had made his plans boldly. Harald would be off guard, expecting friendship, and would receive a blade. The men of Svend the Bloody would find things easy for them. Harald and his warriors would be struck down, and his thralls. Flames would complete the work. And Edvard guessed that the tale would be told afterward how the quarrel had been started by Harald.

And Thyra!

His heart sank when he thought of her. She might be hurt in the battle with none there to protect her. Even though she escaped, would she look once again at Svend's nephew?

In that moment Edvard Haakonson knew that he had turned against his uncle and renounced kinship. He determined to fight on the side of Harald, though it cost him his life. He would protect the woman he loved, even against Svend the Bloody. For Svend was breaking sacred laws in the name of Odin and Thor.

Again he tugged at his bonds, and knew that he could not free himself. But he did not entirely despair. When the attack began, then would he be freed. He could rush to the house with the others, and wield blade. At least, he could take his stand in front of Thyra, and serve her to the end.

The warriors about him seemed like shadows in the woods. The tiny fire had died down to a mass of glowing embers. Svend's men knew that he was secure, and were giving him no attention. They were looking to their weapons, eager for the fray, talking of the loot they would have and the enemies they would slay. Curses for Harald and his house were upon their lips.

Edvard Haakonsson heard a slight noise behind him, but thought nothing of it. Some animal of the forest, attracted by the fire, he believed. But presently he heard a hiss, and his body stiffened.

"Master!" came a whisper. "It is Eric! I followed as you said!"

Edvard Haakonsson thrilled at the words. "The dagger in my belt—take it!" he whispered. "Loose me!"

A hand came out of the darkness behind the trees and tugged at the belt. Edvard felt the dagger slip loose.

"Have a care!" he warned, his lips scarcely moving. "And work with speed!"

He felt the thongs around his wrist give as they were slashed. His hands came free. He reached back and took the dagger from Eric, and then waited a bit.

"Be ready to run, Eric," he whispered, "as soon as I have freed my ankles."

He made sure that none of the warriors was looking at him. Then his hands came swiftly from behind his back, and he slashed with the dagger. The thongs fell from his ankles, and he sprang to his feet.

A warrior turned and saw him, gave cry, and several men plunged toward the black jarl. But they were too late. Edvard Haakonsson crashed through the brush and so gained the trail, Eric the Dumb at his heels, and rushed along it toward the house of Harald.

An arrow sped past him, but he heeded it not. He bent lower, ran swifter. The shouts of pursuit died down. On he ran, stumbling over tangling vines and rocks.

And finally he came to the edge of the clearing before the house of Harald—but too late!

For even as he dashed from the woods a man standing beside the great gates waved a torch above his head. From the big hall came the din of combat. And from the forest poured the warriors of Svend the Bloody to join in the fray!

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ROAR OF BATTLE.

**H**ARALD THE JUST had prepared a feast of feasts. Torches were set thick against the walls. On the dais was Harald's seat, and beside it one especially constructed for Svend. Then came one for Edvard Haakonsson, and down the side of the long table places for the men according to their rank. To Harald's left were the seats for the women, commencing with his fair daughter. Next Thyra was a place for Brynhild, chief of Svend's maidens.

Odors of roast meat filled the great room as the guests gathered. Svend the Bloody walked across with Harald, and took his seat. Magnus, just returned from the woods, gave Svend a look that spoke volumes, and then turned away. But he whispered to Brynhild, and in turn she spoke to her maidens, bidding them flee into the woods if trouble began.

"Your kinsman is absent," Harald said to Svend.

Thyra, too, had noticed his absence, but she thought only that he had been delayed on his visit to the witch.

"Perhaps he will come soon," Svend replied to Harald. "You need not await him. He is a man of moods, and no doubt is out by one of the fires watching the thralls at play."

So Harald gave the sign, and the company was seated. A procession of thralls entered, carrying huge platters of meat and heaping the long tables with food, and filling the goblets. Roast oxen, swine, sheep, and fowls were placed before the guests, but not horse meat, since Harald was a Christian.

Standing in his place, Harald the Just made sure that everything was as he had ordered, and men and women waited for him to speak before eating.

"This is the feast I long have wished to serve," Harald said. "It means that friendship and not war shall abide hereafter between us and our neighbors. Too long have we met only for violence, and now let us meet in peace."

Svend's face remained inscrutable, but it seemed that Magnus was like to choke. All eyes were upon Harald the Just.

"Jarl," he said, turning toward Svend the Bloody, "our religions are not the same, so we must be tolerant toward each other. It is a custom of the Christians, when they sit down to meat, to give thanks to their God for his bounty. I and my people observe this custom."

"You would observe it now?" Svend cried.

"No insult is intended, jarl."

"Yet I see one in it," Svend declared hotly. He thought that here was an excuse ready made for him. "We are your guests, yet you would hurl your queer ceremonies at us. You would pray to your strange God in our presence!"

"Peace!" Harald said, holding up his hand.

"How can there be peace in the face of this?" Svend cried. "Think you I am a craven jarl to let such a thing pass unnoticed? Think you I would let an ancient enemy flaunt me so?"

"Peace, neighbor!"

But Svend the Bloody sprang to his feet. His eyes suddenly were blazing with the frenzy of a fanatic.

"I hold to the gods of my fathers!" he cried. "I recognize none other, nor allow others to do so in my presence! Thor!"

It was the signal. Magnus turned quickly and waved his hand to a man standing near the door. That man sprang outside, grasped a torch, and whirled it thrice above his head.

"Thor!" cried Magnus.

"Thor! Odin and Thor!" shouted Svend's men.

Svend the Bloody sprang backward and darted from the dais, and a waiting war-

rior handed him sword and shield. Back to the walls darted the men, to grasp their shields and weapons.

"Thor! Strike for Thor!" Svend shouted. "Thor is with us!"

And so the battle began.

There was a deal of turmoil, yet not so much as might have been expected. Svend and some of his men noticed at the moment that weapons had appeared as though by a miracle in the hands of Harald's men. And then Svend guessed that Harald had feared this thing, and had prepared for it, so as not to be caught off guard.

The women scattered like leaves before a high wind. Brynhild and her maidens ran for the door and won through to the woods. Harald's women ran shrieking for the stairs and the landing, Thyra among them. Up the steps they rushed, and into the rooms, and there they barred the heavy doors.

"Strike! Strike for the cross!" Harald was shouting.

Thralls ran screaming toward the doors, to be met by Svend's men and cut down. Arrows flew. Swords crashed against shields. Javelins flashed across the great hall. Spears clattered against the walls.

Into this mêlée rushed Edvard Haakonson, his face aflame with rage. A single glance was enough to show him that the thing had gone beyond remedy. Already dead and wounded men were stretched on the floor. The great tables had been overturned. Harald's food was scattered, and not even a hound stopped to claim it.

Edvard's first thought was for Thyra, and he saw with happiness that none of the women remained in the great hall. He would grasp a shield, he decided, and fight his way to the bottom of the steps, there to guard her.

He picked up the first shield that came to his hand, and drew his sword. Close behind him Eric armed himself from a dead man. Together, side by side, they fought their way across the wide room, struggling to reach the bottom of the stairs.

And now Edvard Haakonson discovered a queer thing—that Svend's men were trying to cut him down. There could be no mistake about it. Men who knew him



slashed at him as they passed. Once he caught sight of the grim face of Magnus, and saw the evil gloating in it.

And Harald's men, naturally, turned their blades against him also. Edvard Haakonsson stood alone, surrounded by his foes. Save for Eric the Dumb, there was none to stand back to back with him.

Days before he had sensed that Svend loved him not. He had not taken the trouble to seek the reason for it, nor did he now. He whirled his blade around his head and started to carve his way to the bottom of the flight of steps.

Harald's men had shown themselves to be no weaklings. Even to the frenzied Svend it appeared that Harald's warriors had been prepared, and that they were to be reckoned with in the battle. With the men from the woods in the place, the forces were about equal.

But Harald's men were fighting on territory they knew well, and their cause was just. They rallied to their chieftain's call and smote their enemies. Man after man went down before them. Svend the Bloody called a rally in vain.

Edvard Haakonsson attempted to avoid slaying, since he did not wish to cut down one of the house of Harald, nor a man of his uncle's. But soon he found that he could not. They pressed him into a corner, and he won free with Eric. He saw Magnus fighting to get near him, and realized the man's intent.

"Thor! Thor!" Svend was shouting. "Thor, give us strength!"

Escaping thralls had met with Svend's thralls, and outside the house they were fighting. Outbuildings burst into flame. Shrieks and cries of pain and howls for mercy rent the air.

Edvard Haakonsson found himself in a corner again, and started to follow a wall. He wanted only to be near Thyra, should there be danger for her, either from Svend's men or the flames. From the corners of his eyes he saw that the battle was slowly going against Svend the Bloody. Harald's men stood firm, and their blades were red with the blood of their foes.

"Thor! Thor!" Svend's men bellowed. Through the cutting, slashing throng Ed-

vard fought his way, crying to Eric to follow. He was more than halfway across the big room now. If he could reach the steps, he felt that he could hold them against all comers, unless an arrow shot him down.

And suddenly he found himself on the edge of a group of Svend's men, and Svend himself in command. Svend had been trying to reach Harald the Just, but had not been able to do so. Harald was against the opposite wall, fighting as well as any of his followers. He turned and looked at them, his eyes flaming.

"Thor! Thor!" rang the shouts.

"The cross!"

There was no pretense now. It was Thor against the cross, and all men knew it. And they knew also that Svend the Bloody had planned this thing. But Svend's plans were not working out as he had expected. He was separated from Magnus, or he would have given fresh orders. He saw his men falling on every side. Svend had been in too many battles not to read the outcome. Harald and his men were to be victors.

So this was the end! To die was bad enough, but to die at the hand of an ancient enemy was worse. In that moment Svend the Bloody became a maniac. The hot blood surged through his veins.

"Strike!" he shrieked. "Strike for Thor!"

And so Edvard Haakonsson met him face to face.

"Kinsman! Call away your men!" the black jarl cried. "You are outdone! It is a penalty for the treachery you tried!"

"You—" Svend the Bloody whirled toward him. "A curse on the day you came out of the south!" he cried. "Man with the heart of a woman!"

He flung the others aside and his blade was raised. Edvard Haakonsson darted backward, to save his life and to keep from slaying his uncle.

Svend would have followed, but he did not. For as the others turned to meet fresh foes and let Svend settle this family affair, Svend found himself confronted by a new enemy—a man with blazing eyes and protruding tongue, Eric the Dumb.

It was enough for Eric that he had seen Svend raise blade against Edvard Haak-

onsson. But there was more than that. Far back in his memory Eric had a flash of a scene in Svend's own house, when the Bloody One had slain a thrall with a single blow of his fist.

Eric raised the blade he held. Backward he sprang, and then launched himself forward. He had no method of fighting, but he had great strength. More through good fortune than skill did he avoid Svend's biting blade. And his own swept through the arc—and Svend the Bloody died!

Then Eric whirled around to find that his master was hard pressed by a circle of foes. He bellowed like a beast and charged. Blades bit at him and brought the blood—but they did not stop him. He won to Edvard's side, and together they fought their way on to the wall.

"See!" Edvard commanded. "That door! Behind it, Eric, is the maid I love! Stand before the door, and let no man enter! I will care for myself!"

There was no need of a second command. Perhaps Eric did not understand the full import of it, but he had heard the words. He was to stand on the landing at the top of the flight of steps, before the door, and allow no man to ascend.

He charged through the crowd of frenzied, fighting men, and won to the steps. He cleared them of foes, and took up his station. Below him the battle continued. Svend's men were in little groups now, their backs to the walls, being slowly cut down. Magnus was still in the fighting, but his cries failed to rally the men who remained. The battle was lost, and they knew it well. And in the face of outraged hospitality they could expect no quarter from Harald's men. They could only fight on until they died. Like other men before them, they had followed an unworthy leader, and now were to pay for it.

For an instant Magnus found himself alone. He glanced quickly around the room. He saw the flight of steps and the landing at the top of them, and the door beyond. He saw Eric, too, but thought nothing of that.

If he could force his way up those steps perhaps he could manage to break into the room, he thought. There he could barricade

himself, possibly escape, possibly even find the jarl's daughter and hold her as hostage for his own freedom after the fight.

He rushed to the steps and up them he started. Eric the Dumb growled a menace, and Magnus snarled his laughter. Often he had cuffed Eric aside when Eric had been a thrall. But it was a different Eric he faced now—Eric, the free man, who was remembering the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of many, including Magnus; Eric, who had been commanded by Edvard Haakonsson to let none up the steps and through the door.

Magnus whirled his blade and advanced, and Eric met him squarely. And thus they fought on the landing, while Edvard the Ax Thrower, watching from a little distance, struggled to get to the scene. Magnus, he believed, meant danger to Thyra.

Never before in his life had Svend's big lieutenant been so surprised as he was now. He faced a maniac who had no skill with the blade, but who had great strength and determination. He felt himself starting to give way, and called all his skill and courage into being.

Again he attacked, and Eric swung his blade in a great arc and struck him down. A startled expression came into Magnus's face. He braced himself against the wall. The wound was a bad one, but not mortal. And so once more he rushed to the attack.

But Edvard Haakonsson was at the foot of the flight of steps now. He shouted to Eric, but Eric did not hear. The Dumb One exposed himself to make another great sweep of his blade, and this time it bit home, and Magnus toppled and fell headlong down the steps.

The Ax Thrower was beside Eric in an instant. Now that the battle below was ebbing, now that he had won his way across the hall, he wanted to make certain of Thyra's safety. He rushed to the door, and tried it. It was fastened upon the inside, and he knew that it was useless to call—that she could not hear him above the din. He would have to break in.

"Guard the steps!" he commanded Eric.

An arrow sped past his head and thudded into the door, and a spear followed. Harald's men had seen him, nor guessed his real

intention. They thought only that he intended harm to the daughter of their jarl.

And Brynhild saw him, too. She had come back to the house from the woods, like a female warrior. She had crept into the great hall, to find that Svend the Bloody was dead, and that Svend's men fast were being conquered. And so she had looked around for Magnus, and for the black jarl.

So it was that she saw Magnus go down, and Edvard Haakonson dash up the steps. And now black rage surged in her heart at the man who had turned his back on her beauty and had looked with eager eyes at the white faced daughter of the Christian jarl. She seized a spear and hurled it with all her strength.

Her aim was good, but fortune was against her and with the Ax Thrower. For as the spear sped he stepped back to hurl himself against the door. And the weapon flashed before his eyes like a streak of flame, and thudded into the breast of Eric the Dumb.

"Master! Master!" the man gasped.

He dropped to the landing, and his blood wet it. A little pool collected in front of the door. And the black jarl stepped back to hurl himself forward again.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE SIGN OF THE CROSS.

THYRA had moved mechanically and as though numbed through the tragic events of the hour.

One moment she had been sitting at table, listening to her father and wishing that Edvard the Ax Thrower would come to his seat. The next, men were at one another's throats, weapons were clashing, death shrieks rang out.

She scarcely knew how she managed to get away from the table. It seemed that somebody helped her at first, perhaps one of her father's men. Once, she remembered, she had stumbled and for a time had been beneath the feet of the warriors. But she managed to get to the wall and follow it to the steps, and rush up them and through the door into her own room.

Once inside, she put up the bar across the door, then turned and leaned against it, panting, frightened, her breath coming in little gasps, her bosom heaving. The din of the battle already was like a roar and beat against her ears like crashing waves on a rocky coast.

"Little one! Little one!"

Old Solveig, her nurse, hobbled toward her across the room. Solveig had not left the room, for she was old and walking a task with her. One of the thralls had carried her food, and she had been eating when the jarl's daughter had entered and barred the door.

And now Thyra turned to the old nurse as to a protector, and threw her arms around the hag.

"It is war again," she sobbed. "Svend the Bloody began it. It happened so quickly that I scarce know how it started. There was to have been peace and happiness, and now—"

"Often have I seen war and heard the clash of arms," the old nurse said. "It is the part of a woman to stand aside and wait."

"There was to have been peace! They touched hands before the king," said Thyra. "And because my father would have asked the blessing, Svend called upon Tbor and shouted to his men-at-arms. Now they are fighting and dying! And I was so happy but a short time ago!"

"The young jarl—?" Solveig questioned.

"He was not at the table. I sent him to the witch and he had not returned when the trouble began."

"He is of the house of Svend!"

"But he did not know of this!" Thyra cried. "I am sure he did not know of this, if it was prearranged. He is the soul of honor."

"Many men seem so, are so, to women, but forget their honor among men."

"He did not know!" Thyra declared in faith. "I could have told if he had meant treachery. This will bring a curse upon Svend. He has violated the law of hospitality. And what will the end be?"

"A woman can but wait," old Solveig said. "You have barred the door?"

"Yes, I have barred it."

"Then pray, little one—pray that Harald's men drive out the others. Else, if they do not, it would be better for you to plunge a knife into your bosom. Svend will not be merciful to the daughter of the jarl he hates. He might betroth you to one of his thralls."

"Solveig! Oh, it could not end so!" she cried. "If my Ax Thrower would come to help!"

"Ha! Think you he would fight against his own house?"

"He is but new come to the land."

"But the blood in his veins will speak."

"Only half of it is the blood of Svend's brother!" she declared, faithfully. "I have read his eyes, Solveig. He is good and noble! Do not ask me to doubt him!"

They were silent for a time, Thyra cringing near the door. The old nurse hobbled back to her corner, and her lips moved in prayer, and thus she remained.

Now the girl could hear the warriors clashing at the foot of the flight of steps.

"Thor! Thor!" she heard them shriek.

And because of that she deemed that Svend's men were having the better of the fighting. She did not know that sometimes losing men make the greater noise. Once she sobbed, thinking of her father and once again because of Edvard.

She could not bring herself to believe that the Ax Thrower had a part in the black treachery. Yet she looked into the future, and failed to see happiness. Though her father lived, though he and his men conquered, he would not listen to her love for Edvard Haakonsson now.

And so she sobbed, because she felt that she was losing the first and only love in her life, no matter what the outcome of the battle. And then she remembered that she was the daughter of a jarl!

Her little head was lifted quickly, and her eyes were dried. Anger flamed in them, and strength of purpose. She turned quickly and glanced around the room.

She found what she had sought. In a corner stood a great bow, such as her father's archers used, and arrows for it. It was a serviceable bow, made by one of the old men, and presented to her on the new feast day that celebrated the birth of

Him they meant when they spoke of the cross.

There was a dagger in the corner, too, as could be found in every room of the great house. Thyra hurried to the corner and took up the dagger and slipped it into her girdle. Then she picked up the big bow.

Her purpose was clear now. If Svend's bloody men won the battle, she would act the part of a jarl's daughter. The bow would be for the first foe who entered the room, and the dagger for herself. Never would Svend the Bloody carry her in triumph to his jarldom to make a mock of her!

But the bow was a strong one meant for a warrior, and she could not handle it. Yet she found a way. She hurried to the great fireplace, where old Solveig's little fire of twigs long since had died. And there she braced the big bow in one end, the bottom of it in a cleft between two rocks, of which the fireplace was built. The top she allowed to remain outside, pressed against the mantel. And so, holding it in the middle, she could draw it back.

She tried it, and succeeded. She placed one of the arrows on the bowstring, and drew it back with all her strength, and then let it loose again.

One shot she could make, she knew. When they battered at the door, she would draw back the arrow and hold it so, aimed at the opening. And when the first foe entered, she would let the arrow go. Then there would remain the dagger for herself.

Again she rushed across the room and crouched close beside the door. It seemed to her that the tumult of the fight had drawn nearer. She heard curses and cheering, but she could make out no words to tell her how the fight was going. Old Solveig was still praying in the corner, and Thyra made shift to say a little prayer also.

She glanced down at the floor, and recoiled. Blood was trickling beneath the door. A tiny stream of it followed a crack, and then widened to a tiny pool. She drew away from it, covering her eyes with her hands, shivering a bit. And then she remembered again that she was the daughter of a jarl!

And then there came a blow against the

door, as though some warrior had hurled himself at it.

Thyra gave a little cry and rushed back to the big fireplace. She picked up the bow, put the arrow against the string, and waited. There came another thud against the door, and she heard a man's voice shouting. The door gave a little. The bar across it seemed to groan in agony.

Still another thud, and the door gave a trifle more. In a moment it would be torn open, she knew. Once more her lips moved in prayer—and then she drew back the arrow as far as her strength would permit.

Another chorus of cries came from the great hall beyond, another clash of weapons. An instant of comparative silence, and then the door was struck with a crash! Open it flew, a man in armor stood stooped in it. Through her half closed eyes, Thyra saw him. Then she let the arrow go.

Straight it went, and true it struck. The man whirled halfway around and crashed to the floor of the landing, half inside the room, half out. The dagger already was in Thyra's hand ready for use on her own tender breast. But she did not use it.

One frightened glance she gave, and then screamed with pain. For the man her arrow had struck was Edvard Haakonsson!

A moment she stood as though turned to stone. Then the dagger dropped to her feet. Across the room she flew, and down upon her knees she went, not caring that her garment soaked up the blood on the floor.

"Edvard!" she cried. "Edvard!"

She brushed against the arrow, and it fell aside, but she did not notice that. Neither did she notice that the force of the arrow had not been great enough to make it pierce his armor. He had slipped in the blood of Eric the Dumb, had crashed backward, and his head had struck. But she thought that she had killed him.

Again she cried out as though in agony. She had eyes for nothing save the man upon the floor, whose head she was trying to lift. She took off his helmet and threw it aside. The din of the battle was growing less, but she did not notice. She heard voices as though from a distance, and among them that of her father.

And then there came a touch on her arm, and at first she recoiled in horror, remembering that she had dropped the dagger. But it was her father who had touched her. He stood before her, his face stern and marked with blood. And behind him were other men of the house of Harald.

"Here is one of the viper's brood," Harald said. "If he is not dead, slay him! What do you here, my daughter?"

One of the men would have pulled Edvard outside, but she sprang to her feet and stopped him.

"Don't you understand?" she cried. "I have killed him! I braced the big bow in the fireplace, and shot the arrow. It struck his breast!"

"A worthy deed, worthy of a jarl's woman," Harald said.

"I killed him!" she wailed.

"Not yet is he dead," said one of the men.

"Then away with him!" Harald cried. "Work your will on him! Scum of a pagan—"

Once more she was down upon her knees, pillowing Edvard's head against her breast.

"No—no!" she cried.

"What is this?" Harald's voice was stern.

"Don't you understand? I have wounded him. And you must not touch him. I—I love him, my father!"

"Love him?" Harald the Just cried. "Love one of the brood of Svend?"

"Since that day at the fair," she said, weeping again. "I love him, and he loves me. We have spoken of it. Perhaps it was wrong to keep it from you. But he wanted to ask you to-night, ask you to let him wed with me."

"Can this be my daughter? Are your wits asleep?" Harald cried. "Scum, he is! One of Svend's brood!"

"Nor is he!" she screeched. "He is new come to the land!"

"A part of the black treachery of to-night!"

"He did not know! I am sure that he did not know!" she cried. "He was not at the table when it happened—"

"He has turned your head, this pretty jarl! But we'll have an end of him!"

"Then it will be the end of me, too, my father! For if he is slain, then will I slay myself. I swear it—on the cross!"

The men recoiled, and for a moment Harald himself was dumb. But he looked down at the Ax Thrower again, and again was stern.

"He merits death! A follower of Thor—"

"No, no!"

She stooped closer over him, as though to protect him from harm. Her face was against his. Her hands were at his throat, fondling it. And they touched something there.

Her father bent over to pull her away. But her sharp cry stopped him. He looked down at her, and the others also. She had tugged at the thing about his neck beneath the armor, and it was a metal chain. She pulled it forth—and on the end of it was a crucifix!

"See!" she cried. "He wears the cross!"

"The cross!" Harald cried. "Nephew of Svend the Bloody wear a cross? Then it is stolen, perhaps—he wears it as a mockery!"

Edvard Haakonsson moaned and opened his eyes. He struggled to sit up, and Thyra aided him. He looked around, and smiled.

"I fell," he said. "I slipped in blood, and crashed my head!"

"No, my Ax Thrower! I shot you with an arrow!" Thyra told him.

"Then am I content to die—"

But Harald stopped it. "On your feet, black jarl!" he cried. "Men, lift him!"

They jerked him to his feet, and he leaned weakly against the wall. The smile had fled from his face. Thyra pulled away from her father and ran to his side, and clung to him.

"I love him!" she said. "Can you not understand?"

But Harald the Just was looking straight into Edvard's eyes and was deaf to her plea.

"What have you to say to me, black jarl?" he demanded. "Such black treachery—"

"I knew nothing of it, on my word!" the Ax Thrower said.

"And what is your word worth to me?

You knew nothing of it—you, Svend's kinsman? How could he plan it, except with you?"

"Yet he did," Edvard Haakonsson replied. "I speak the truth! I knew nothing of it until Svend's men caught me in the woods and made me prisoner. I would have warned you, but escaped only just as the signal was given?"

"And by whom can you prove this?"

"By only one man, and there he lies—dead!" He pointed to the body of Eric.

"It is poor evidence. You, a man of Thor—"

"I am a Christian!" Edvard announced. "Always have I been a Christian. That was why my father did not return to the land of his birth to claim his jarldom. In the southland where he met my mother he turned Christian, and he was happier there."

"How do I know this is not a lie?" Harald demanded. "A pagan might lie to save his life's blood! The cross at your throat may have been stolen."

"Think so, if you will."

"Enough of this!" Harald cried. "One of you pull my daughter away, for she is bewitched. And hand me an ax. Mine own is missing. With my own hands will I slay the last of the brood of Svend, in the name of the cross!"

Edvard Haakonsson stood straight and tall and pale against the wall. His eyes narrowed as they pulled the weeping Thyra away, and he looked after her with love in his glance.

Harald the Just grasped the ax a man gave him and stood before the black jarl.

"It is but justice!" he said.

"Would you strike down an unarmed jarl?"

"This is an execution, jarl! You are not worthy to be met in honorable combat! Scum of the Svend blood! Do you even falter in the face of death?"

"Not I!" Edvard cried. "But I crave an instant before you strike!"

Harald held his hand a moment, then slowly raised the ax over his shoulder. But Edvard Haakonsson was not praying to Odin for aid. The smile touched his lips again, he raised his right hand, and swiftly he made the sign of the cross!

"Strike, Harald, surnamed the Just!" his voice rang out. "Strike through that sign—if you dare!"

The ax fell to the floor. Harald the Just stepped a pace backward.

"You—you—" he gasped. "You are—indeed—a Christian?"

"I have spoken truth. Blind man, can you see now?"

A sudden tumult in the great hall below! Men were cheering, and there came the tramping of many feet. Harald the Just and his men whirled as though to face new foes, and Thyra crept forward again and into the shelter of Edward's arms.

And in upon them walked—Olaf Trygvesson!

"Hail, Harald!" said the king. "I had some inkling of this, and hurried hence with warriors to give you aid. But you needed no aid, it seems! And what is this? My black jarl? You would have slain him?"

"Had I not found him a Christian!" Harald said.

"Give thanks that you did not. I am convinced that he knew nothing of this treachery. I do know that Svend even plotted against him to get his estates, and now he may have his own and Svend's also. The day you left the fair a ship out in from the south, and brought me news of this black jarl. A good Christian he is, and always has been! And he is our friend!"

"I am glad I stayed my hand," Harald said.

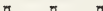
But Olaf Trygvesson had turned to the Ax Thrower.

"Claim your estates, weed out the unworthy, and build your house anew, Edward, my friend," he said. "I'll lend you warriors. And when you have done those things, come to me at Trondhjem, like a good Christian, and help me build my church."

He paused a moment, and his eyes twinkled as he looked down at Thyra.

"And when you come to Trondhjem, black jarl, bring your bride with you," he added. "It is our royal command!"

#### THE END



## RECORDS

WHEN the phonograph plays,  
I like to fold my hands and close my eyes,  
And think of the days  
When the babies had croup, and each sunrise  
Brought so much work I used to cry,  
Thinking it would never be done;  
And the farm hands, there was such a crowd. I would lie  
Awake nights thinking of to-morrow's task  
And praying the Lord to lighten the load  
If only by one.

Now I've got what I asked.

We ought to be careful about what we pray.  
There's no crowd now. (We found coal on the land),  
There are no children to quarrel and play—  
No croup, though at night I don't sleep,  
Thinking on to-morrow—not how much milk  
I can get from the new cow  
Or how I can keep  
The tomatoes to can another day,  
But how  
I've got to put on that everlasting silk,  
And sit in the drawing-room  
All by myself, and hear the phonograph play  
About yesterday,

*Floyd Meredith.*



# Alias His Lordship

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

"I SENT for you, Rio," said the warmest-hearted judge in the State of Arizona, "because I wanted to talk to you, man to man, here in my office. I thought you wouldn't profit greatly by a preachment before everybody in the court room, Rio."

"I'm very much obliged to you for that," quickly replied the six feet of sunburned but good looking, sometimes stubborn, young manhood that the cow country insisted upon calling "Rio Jack" instead of plain John Byerly.

The judge resumed in a fatherly manner:

"You're a striking specimen of fine red blood gone wild, Rio, and you'd better go somewhere else and flip a new leaf in the pamphlet of life. I hardly know where to advise you to go, for it seems that the newspapers everywhere have saddled a devil of a reputation on you—and you earned part of it. You really must cut out your buck-wildness, son. You barely came clear to-

day. All that saved you was flaws in the evidence and a mercifully inclined jury, Rio."

"Man to man, judge, you said," frowned Byerly, his eyes narrow and bright. "I want you to know that I was guilty of only two of the holdups, and that I didn't profit a red cent by either of them. Whitson was hounding an old woman to death for a debt she didn't rightly owe him, and I took barely enough of his money to pay it off. The railroad's lawyer compromised with Jim Faidley's fool wife for three hundred dollars after Jim was killed. I stuck up the pay roll car and took twenty-seven hundred more for her—insinuated that I owed it to Jim, you see. That's all. Maybe it won't be so hard to begin over. The papers never had my picture, you know."

"Then, you will make another start, Rio?" The older man rose and put out his hand.

Byerly took it gratefully.



"I will, if it's humanly possible," Rio Jack promised in a soft drawl that was Southern rather than Western. "Much obliged to you, sir, and good-by, and good luck!"

He put on his wide rimmed, high peaked Stetson, and walked out, his silver spurs jangling musically on the heels of his Spanish boots. It was growing dark, and the shapes of his and his pal's horses were indistinct at the hitching rack. The dim figure of Old Top Wiggins detached itself from near-by shadows and moved forward like steel toward a magnet: it is a simile that fits beautifully. Byerly always addressed his pal by the English term "Old Top."

This odd pair had read English fiction everlastingly; their shanty on No Gold Creek in the scrub was full of it.

"What did he want with yuh, Rio?" asked Wiggins.

Byerly told it briefly.

Wiggins drew from inside his brown shirt a crumpled newspaper, which he had just purloined from the lobby of a hotel a short distance down the street; he unfolded it, lighted a match, and called Byerly's attention to a paragraph among the personals:

JOHN L. A. BYERLY—Communicate at once with Edward & Erward, Attorneys, Atlanta, Georgia. Much to your advantage.

"There, Rio," said Old Top Wiggins, "is yuh new leaf, mebbe. What's the 'L. A.' in yuh name for? Louisiana?"

Byerly smiled. "Lord and Annesley. Lord is an old family name, and Annesley was the name of the Methodist bishop who had the honor of christening me. How much money have we got in the treasury, Old Top?"

Wiggins was grinning in the dusk. "Lord Annesley! Cripes! And here I've been associatin' with royalty, and didn't know it. What did yuh say—how much money? After hirin' two lawyers, yuh've got a nerve to ask. We've got what's in our hosses, saddles, bridles, and spurs, yuh lordship."

"They're dandy horses, saddles, bridles, and spurs," muttered Byerly, ignoring Wiggins's fun. "They ought to assay a sizable bank roll, Old Top—eh?"

"Yuh mean—"

"We'll go to Atlanta," said Rio Jack. "I think I know what's happened. Uncle John is dead, and I'm his heir."

They walked, leading their horses, to the telegraph office, and Byerly wired Edward & Erward. The following day they sold their possessions to the highest bidder at fancy prices, and boarded an eastbound train. Though neither of them was yet twenty-six, they had shared each other's wild fortunes and misfortunes for too long even to think of separating now.

## II.

EDWARD & ERWARD had more or less pretentious offices, and the erstwhile Robin Hood and his shadow, in cow country clothes, walked into them with the feeling that they were distinctly out of place. Immediately the two were ushered by an obsequious clerk into the inner sanctum of the elder Erward, a good and kindly man.

"Sit down, gentlemen," he said. "Now, Mr. Byerly, we shall, of course, have to establish your identity. You've been sort of out of pocket since you were about fifteen, I believe."

"Yes," Byerly nodded, with a slow smile. "My parents were both dead, and, if I remember correctly, I had been fairly soaking in a so-called book entitled 'Two Gun Bill, Red Ranger of the Rockies; or, The Black Terror Tracked to Doom.' Fifteen is an impressionable age, Mr. Erward."

"I see. Then you realized—" began the old lawyer. He stopped as though he feared to go further with it.

Byerly suddenly looked blue. He had read Erward's thoughts quite without effort.

"So the newspapers have had accounts of it here, too, eh—my little dash at outlawry?"

"Full of it," the attorney said. "It was highly romantic for this commercial age, your playing pranks at the expense of officers, and all the rest of it. As I was saying, we shall have to establish your identity."

The heir apparent gave without mistake family names, dates of births and demises, and some fifty other small facts; he told of

his bachelor uncle's butterfly tattoo, scars, moles, cataract, stiff knee, and numerous idiosyncrasies. No further proof of his genuineness being deemed necessary, Erward drew from a desk a bundle of papers, and proceeded:

"You will remember your boyhood home in the Clearwater River section, which your father sold to your Uncle John before his death; it is yours now. Your uncle spent his last days in Atlanta, having the plantation looked after by an overseer. Nobody except an old negro woman is in the house, which is fully furnished; it's much as you left it, I imagine. There was considerable money, though I had to spend a lot of it in advertising through the West for you. I— But what's wrong?"

John Lord Annesley Byerly had gone to his feet, had begun to pace the floor gloomily. Old Top Wiggins watched him, open mouthed. Such luck as that, and to be worried over it!

Byerly turned to his lawyer.

"The Clearwater River section is a section of the stiffest aristocrats, and I'm an outlaw—or was one very recently. How will I manage it, Mr. Erward? I'll be taboo—don't you see? I don't want to sell the place; I want to settle there at the old plantation home, and I couldn't have people always turning up their noses at me! How will I ever manage it, Mr. Erward?"

The elder Erward shook his head. He knew, none better, that John Byerly, as John Byerly, the Rio Jack of the newspapers, would indeed be taboo in the exclusive Clearwater country; that Byerly would be a pariah, an outcast, in spite of his goodly possessions and his fine old family name.

Suddenly Old Top Wiggins shot to his feet, his eyes twinkling and his bronzed face beaming.

"I've got it, Rio!" he exclaimed. "I've sure got it! Go out there as Lord Annesley, and be that until yuh've proved yubself a respectable and law-abidin' citizen."

Byerly stared at his pal, his pal of the sagebrush and the purple distances. Erward, too, stared at Wiggins. Byerly had enough of the old wild daring left in him to be interested, his new resolutions con-

cerning non-spectacular methods of living notwithstanding. He turned to Erward. The latter named person, for all of his years, had a thick streak of romance under his skin.

"Why not?" said Erward. "Those are your middle names, and you would hardly be masquerading unlawfully. Nobody remembers your middle names, and nobody will remember your face; they know you only as a boy. I can make out a deed conveying the plantation from John L. A. Byerly to Lord Annesley, which will be in your possession and might prove of help to you. After you've made real friends of the people, of course, you could tell about it, and they should be sports enough to take it as a rather good joke. You would have established yourself then, Byerly, you see. So, why not, indeed? I can think of no better way for you."

"I'll be valet to your lordship, Rio," Wiggins suggested eagerly, his eyes sparkling. "I can do it, all right."

"Then make out the deed," decided John Byerly, "from me to myself. I'm Lord Annesley until further notice. Meantime, Wiggins and I will go to a haberdasher's and buy rigging that is more in line with our new stations in the little game of life. The thing I dread most, by the way, is the monacle."

So it came to pass that John Byerly, erstwhile Rio Jack, hereinafter known chiefly both by outsiders and by us as Annesley, or Lord Annesley, together with his true friend Wiggins, went to the Clearwater River country in toggerly that was as nearly English as Atlanta's clothiers could furnish or procure or have made on short notice.

### III.

LORD ANNESLEY, looking the part perfectly to those who didn't know the part very well, stepped from an afternoon train at the town that was the county seat, screwed a monacle into one eye, and looked about him calmly. The jaws of the station loungers and a few other onlookers dropped. Annesley turned to Wiggins, his valet.

"I'll be seeing after the luggage, yuh lordship," anticipated Old Top.

"Do, Wiggins. Have a liveryman cart it out to Byerly Hall at once," nodded Lord Annesley. "Also hire a conveyance for ourselves."

Wiggins disappeared, and a representative of Barronsville's little news sheet rushed up, pad and pencil in hand. Annesley filled the reporter's ears full, and the man began a series of running leaps toward the center of town. Then the eyes of the star actor in this rather extraordinary masquerade sought out a lean, iron gray man with a familiar star on his shirt front, a man who was walking in a desultory fashion with a heavily built fellow that apparently worshipped at the shrine of dress.

His lordship let the monocle fall to the length of its ribbon, and walked over to the pair.

"How far is it," he asked, for he himself didn't quite remember, "to the old Byerly plantation?"

"Three miles and three-tenths," said the sheriff.

"Have you bought it?" the heavily built man inquired apprehensively.

"Yes. I am Lord Annesley, gentlemen."

"I'm Garford Redding, and this is Sheriff Severson." The three shook hands. "I'd have bought that place," Redding went on, "if I'd had half a chance. I wired Erward & Erward to give me the refusal of it, damn 'em, and they didn't. That young buck, Byerly, cut a pretty wide swath in the West, didn't he, Mr. Annesley?"

"Not *Mr.* Annesley; *Lord* Annesley. I—er—understand that he did. Through the newspapers, anyway."

Garford Redding laughed a laugh that made him seem suddenly mean and old, though he couldn't have been over thirty-six.

"Ah, I see! Peerage, eh? Well, Severson, you watch Clearwater take some notice. They're not precisely snobs, but—oh, you know them, Severson. I wish you good luck with the plantation, my lord, but I fancy you won't have it. When you want to sell, let me know. Aren't you pretty badly sunburned for a lord, your lordship?"

"Been in the West a bit," drawled Annesley.

"See anything of that ring-tailed terror, Jack Byerly?"

"A number of times. I knew him. Odd character, that. Remarkable shot, too. Saw him shoot the ash off a sheriff's cigar once."

"Hum!" snorted Redding. "You knew him, and that's how it came that you've got the plantation."

"Exactly."

"I see by the papers," Redding pursued, "that the courts acquitted him. It was a travesty upon justice! No wonder the country's going bolshevik. When such scrapings as John Byerly—"

"Hold!" cut in Annesley. He had a temper, and it had flashed red-hot. "I can't hear a man I've known and liked talked about in any such fashion—"

Redding sneered: "Oh, you *can't*! You *can't*; eh?"

While Lord Annesley struggled with himself, Garford Redding lighted a fat brown cigar. Redding tilted the burning end of his weed at a rakish angle, straightened the huge diamond he wore in his tie, looked Annesley up and down, winked at the sheriff and walked off. Annesley clenched his sunburned hands; his jaw muscles stood out in ridges on his tanned cheeks. Wiggins came up behind him, and touched his arm respectfully.

"Don't forget yubself, my lord," cautioned Wiggins.

Annesley turned toward Sheriff Severson, who, he noted, was disposed to be friendly toward him.

"Who is this Garford Redding?"

"To give it to your lordship straight," frowned the officer, with a glance toward Redding's disappearing back, "he is in a fine way to become both political and financial boss of this county. He holds mortgages—gosh knows how many; he's simply got money to feed to the cows, made it gambling in cotton futures. Not a very sweet fellow to have for an enemy, by the way, which maybe a hint to the wise. Redding came of a family that used to fight the Byerlys, away back years ago, every time they met."

"The automobile is waiting, yuh lordship," pompously announced Wiggins.

Annesley gave the sheriff good day, and

stepped into a big car that bore a dealer's license number. Wiggins ensconced himself properly beside the driver, and they were off, their baggage following aboard a small truck.

The name Redding stuck in Annesley's mind like a splinter of hot iron. He recalled a few hazy facts concerning the old feud. It had been mostly before his time, but he had the impression that it had been bitter enough, and in this he was correct.

Byerly Hall—every plantation home in the Clearwater section had its more or less high-sounding name—was a great old house, a little weatherworn now, with huge columns to its veranda, and vines and shrubs and trees everywhere around it. Lord Annesley stepped from the automobile with a mist forming before his eyes; a sudden rush of tender boyhood memories threatened seriously to unman him.

Once more he saw himself running barefoot through the cotton bloom, in the bright sunshine, playing lone Indian; saw his good old father poring over his Bible in the living-room; saw himself kneeling at his mother's feet at bedtime, imploring compassion and forgiveness for the day's shortcomings. When he came to himself, Old Top Wiggins was shaking his arm as few valets have dared to shake the arm of their masters, and whispering desperately:

"Rio, Look! Look, for Heaven's sake! Rio, yuh old spavined, booty pinto—are yuh plum' blind?"

Lord Annesley saw and gasped. Coming toward them from the house, down between two long rows of flowering cape jessamines, like a fairy out of a magician's box, was a young woman—a slender hut roundish, punishingly handsome young woman.

"Good afternoon!" she greeted. Though her manner was that of one who owned the ground beneath her feet—and, incidentally, any other ground she might walk upon—she was as sweet as a bay blossom.

The present owner of the old Byerly plantation took off his soft hat, and wisely refrained from touching his monocle.

"Good afternoon," he said cordially. In a voice that Wiggins thought very distinguished, he continued: "I am Lord Annesley, and I have bought this estate."

"You—you've bought it!" the girl cried amazedly. "Why, I—I thought—Father wired Erward & Erward that he would probably pay a little more than anybody else offered for the place, and I thought we'd surely get it. I've been trespassing, Mr.—Mr.—Lord Annesley; that is, I've been shaping up your roses. I hope you don't mind that; and you won't of course. I'm Lila Devine, and I—we are your nearest neighbors to the south of here. And you are really a lord?"

She had him there! He smiled and didn't answer because he couldn't bring himself to lie outright to her. Old Top Wiggins stepped boldly forward with relief for the situation.

"It is really Lord Annesley," he said, and his master effectually concealed a wince. Annesley found himself shaking hands with Lila Devine, talking with her as freely as though they had known each other right along. Now that he came to think of it, he remembered her. He had gone to school with her; he had fought for her; she had been his boyhood sweetheart—a slim little thing in pigtail plaits and prinkly, crinkly knee-length dresses.

"We were surprised," she told him presently, while Wiggins looked on in considerable apprehension, "when Jack Byerly turned out as he did. You see, we knew him very well here. He was such a nice boy, too, though he had a pretty high temper. Do you know, Lord Annesley, you somehow remind me of the Byerlys. They were much like you, tall and strong looking—much like you."

Annesley's gaze wandered. He wanted to confess to her that he was John Byerly; the deception was becoming singularly hateful to him now. He was human, and normal, and therefore not immune to feminine attractions; he had liked Lila Devine as a boy, and he liked her better now as a man.

Wiggins cut into his train of thought:

"The luggage is here, my lord. I'll see it into the house?"

"Please do," said the master of Byerly Hall. "Miss Devine," he went on, resolving to go through with the deception because he saw no decent way out of it, "I think I'd like to ask your father's advice

about cotton growing. Do you object to my walking home with you?"

"Not in the least," she smiled. "Father will be glad to give you any information he can, I'm sure. He'll be glad to have you for a neighbor; you see, he was a little afraid—"

Annesley finished it for her: "Afraid wild young Byerly would come back here and terrorize the neighborhood?"

Lila Devine blushed a trifle. "That's just what father said."

It was a mile to the big house of the Devine plantation, and they did not permit conversation to lapse for more than a few yards of it. Old Betterton Devine was not at home. Annesley told the girl good-by at the gate, and turned—to face a sneering Garford Redding, who had but that moment ridden up astride a beautiful horse of Kentucky blood.

"Good aftahnoon, your ludship!" Redding mimicked insolently.

Out of the corner of his eye, Annesley noted that a tiny shadow of resentment had crossed the features of the bay blossom girl. He lifted his hat to her again, ignoring Redding, and set out homeward.

"Aha!" Redding snickered. "Sdeath! Methinks—"

"Garford!" Lila reproved sharply.

Annesley could have wept for the black shame of it. How he longed to nick both of Redding's jackass ears with .45 hunks of lead, or thrash the road with his body in a hand to hand, man to man fight! He knew he could do it easily. Out on the Rio Grande or the Pecos or the Nueces they wouldn't have staked a single dollar against a hundred thousand on Redding in any kind of battle with Rio Jack.

But Annesley didn't even look backward.

"Garford," he muttered, as he turned in at his own gate. "She called him 'Garford.' But perhaps he's sort of friend of the family."

Mrs. Betterton Devine would have agreed very readily that Redding was a friend to the family, and a warm and true one. Old Betterton Devine, himself a man's man, tolerated Redding for the sake of keeping argument and ill feeling out of his domestic circle; so did his daughter.

On the upper veranda step at Byerly Hall, an old and corpulent negress sat waiting for Lord Annesley. She looked bereft; her black face a picture of poignant grief. Annesley remembered her very well; it was Mammy Lucinda, who had more than once tied up stubbed bare toes for him.

"What's the matter, aunty?" he asked.

She rose with many groans that bespoke rheumatic joints, and glowered at him in pitiable defiance.

"Heah you is!" she clipped. "I is 'spectin' young Misto' John, and heah you is! Mah po' lil baby John, w'ich I used to nuss on mah lap—dey says he wild, and a outlawyer, and evvything, but I knows he ain't! Be dam' to me ef I ain't jes' got to cuss. Mah Lawd! *Mah Lawd!* Is I gwine stay heah and say 'mah Lawd' to you? You lowdown po' white trashness, I sho'ly ain't! I gits out right now, dis instant! I ain't got no place to lay mah po' ole haid, but I ain't gwine stay heah wid no lowdown po' white trashness, suh!"

Iron man that this last Byerly was, her affection-born vehemence drove a dimness into his eyes. He took her by an arm and led her into the old living room, which was deserted save for them—he could hear Wiggins pounding around somewhere else. Before the high old floor clock he stopped her.

"I'll have to let you into my fool secret, Mammy Lucinda," he half whispered. "I'm John Byerly myself."

"You ain't!" she stormed. It was fixed in her mind that he wasn't.

He pointed to the silent old clock.

"Who," he smiled, "used to cry for that?"

Mammy Lucinda stared. "Who," he pursued, "used to steal your ples and climb into the mulberry tree to eat them? And who once blacked his face with shoe-black, and got a whipping for it? And who smoked his grandfather's pipe and got sick over it? And—whose middle names in the old Bible there are Lord and Annesley?"

Convinced, Mammy Lucinda held a little jubilee of her own. Then she crossed her heart that she wouldn't tell until the proper time came—and she didn't.

Soon the stentorian voice of Old Top Wiggins rang out:

"My Lord, a gentleman to see yuh at the gate!"

Annesley walked down to where Garford Redding sat his horse with a wicked smile on his fattish face. Wiggins followed like a shadow, and as unobtrusively. Annesley halted and surveyed the visitor through his monocle as though that visitor were an insect.

"Well, my man?"

"Just wanted to say, your ludship," growled Redding, "that it's not best for you to get it into your royal head that you're going to be the entire cheese in this neighborhood. Take warning before some overnight organization of men finds it expedient to doll you all up in tar and feathers. Get me?"

It was not "Lord Annesley," but "Rio Jack," that took a hasty step toward the horseman.

"Don't forget yuhself, my lord," called Old Top Wiggins. "Plainly, the man is a varlet."

Annesley stopped, turned, and went without a word toward the house. Garford Redding laughed, and rode on toward Baronsville. At the veranda steps, Wiggins caught up with his pal.

"Look here, Rio," he whispered, "yuh're goin' to let loose and spoil the whole shoot-in' match first thing yuh know! I want yuh to trash that goosher eater, but not now. Do yuh tumble, old boss?"

His pal laughed. "I tumble, Old Top. Say, I'm ungodly hungry. See what can be done, won't you?"

Wiggins found Mammy Lucinda working so fast in the kitchen, in spite of her rheumatic joints, that she reminded him of sleight of hand performers that he had seen.

#### IV.

FINE summer days passed, thirty of them. His bogus lordship, chafing all the while because of the deception—though he felt sure that it had been built on the best of excuses, had visited and been visited; he had been dined, fêted, lionized, made the reigning figure at countless social functions. If there was a person other than Garford Redding and his circle of gay and sporty

intimates who didn't like Lord Annesley immensely, Lord Annesley didn't know it.

Garford Redding was, or imagined himself to be, hopelessly in love with Lila Devine now, and his jealousy had developed from the ordinary kind into an insane or savage variety. To be blocked where he had been most confident of winning—such was the colossal conceit of the man—was as much as he could bear without literally running amuck!

From the very beginning, Redding had openly made sport of Annesley; and now that Betterton Devine's daughter showed a decided preference for Annesley's company, Redding ran his sport making into sheer persecution. Had it not been for his money and his mortgages, especially the latter, the Clearwater River people wouldn't have stood for it. But Annesley remained Annesley through it all, though he was bitterly tempted a score of times to revert to Rio Jack; he spent solid hours in dreaming of shooting nicks out of Redding's ears and thrashing him as man has seldom or never been thrashed before.

Then it happened. Garford Redding was at the bottom of it; in fact, it was altogether his idea, and he captained its working out. He meant it to be the greatest of Annesley's persecutions.

Mrs. Betterton Devine was giving a reception in honor of a niece from Macon, and it was to be an eclipsing affair, a totally eclipsing affair, on the lawn. The Devine home had its own little electric plant, and the front grounds were bright with lights, some of them in showy Japanese lanterns, hung in festoons from magnolias and oaks. At the last minute, Garford Redding followed his carefully built plans and prevailed upon Mrs. Devine—who, as will be remembered, was strong for Redding, anyway—to permit him to spring an innovation by pulling off a fake hold-up; the joke was to be on a few sissified and harmless young swains, he said, and he himself would notify the others in advance in order that there would be no bothersome fainting.

He did notify the others in advance—a few minutes—all, that is, except Lila Devine; he wouldn't run the risk of her telling Annesley, who, of course, was one of the

"harmless young swains." Redding's pea-sized brain had figured that the Clearwater aristocrats would see Lord Annesley whining like a whipped puppy, down on his knees and praying for his life, before the evening's amenities were over.

His lordship was formally presented to the young woman from Macon, after which tiny ceremony he found Lila Devine and with her stole away to a lawn settee in the shadows near the front gate. At last, he had decided to tell her of the deception, ask her pardon, and then—sell his plantation and disappear, probably. Not once did it occur to him that she might possibly find him in the right; he did not consider that the naked hearts of queens and charwomen are alike exactly. His former hope that his masquerade would be laughed off after he and it became known had tumbled into gray ruins.

Annesley was glad that she could not see his features clearly. His cheeks were on fire with that which he thought of as his guilt.

"Lila," he began awkwardly, "I've got a confession to make to you. There's small chance that you'll ever forgive me—"

A heavy figure came briskly through the near-by front gateway; it was Garford Redding, who had just finished giving instructions to his eight masked men. He saw Lila and her companion, and recognized them.

"Mooning!" he exclaimed, villainous rage close under his pretended gayety. "You two—mooning!"

Annesley's flush faded quickly; he became white; he wanted to fly at Redding. Redding moved on.

"That man is detestable," quietly said Lila. "What were you saying? Forgive you? But there's nothing to forgive."

"There is, and much. I—you don't know yet," Annesley stammered.

"But I think I do know," she insisted.

"W-what?"

"You're Jack Byerly."

Jack Byerly's eyes widened. Came a moment of silence between them.

"How long have you known, Lila?"

"Almost from the first," Lila told him.

"You see, I remembered your middle

names! It was easy for me to find your reason for that, Jack, and I'd have done just as you did. And you've behaved yourself so well, in the face of all Garford Redding's r-rotten treatment of you, that nobody's apt to want to turn you out—except Garford. You've been very nice, Jack, indeed! It was a sort of crucible for you, wasn't it?"

Byerly rose. He stared toward the others, who had gathered around an old negress fortune teller, without really seeing any of them. Then he turned back to the girl.

"And you remembered," he muttered, "that we were sweethearts—a long time ago?"

"Yes," Lila Devine admitted softly. "You were the only sweetheart I've had, Jack—"

She blushed wildly because she hadn't meant to say quite all that!

Soon Byerly spoke again:

"I'm going to do this, Lila, and to-night: I'm going to make a clean breast of it before everybody, and I hope I'll be forgiven; and if I am, I'm going to ask you to marry me."

He led her toward the old negress and her ouija board.

They had barely joined the others when the watchful Garford Redding ran his fingers slowly three times through his dark hair; it was a signal. Immediately the group was surrounded by men who carried rifles and revolvers—empty—and wore blue bandanna masks under broad rimmed hats.

"Hands up!" they called in gruff voices.

"Hands up—quick!"

The order was carried out promptly. Garford Redding himself led it. Jack Byerly was the last.

"Women out!" the masked men growled.

The women stole hastily toward the veranda.

If Byerly had had a few minutes in which to think the thing over, he would have seen through it. As it was, he took it all in deadly earnest. Those watching from the veranda saw Byerly dart behind a convenient tree just as the supposed robbers began to collect watches and purses; they saw Byerly go into a rear trouser pocket and come back with his right hand full of the

blue steel of an automatic pistol—they saw him spring from his shelter almost within the second, his voice keen with the ring of iron and ice.

"Drop your guns, you tin horn robbers! Drop 'em for *Rio Jack*!"

*Bang!* and *Bang!* and *Bang!* Three masked men dropped their weapons because their wrists were broken.

He was in their midst now. The three wounded men took to their heels; the other five of the pseudo-highwaymen stood as though they were frozen stiff. Redding, his face a pasty, ashen hue, began to gibber:

"It was all a joke, Annesley—a joke—don't you see? You've crippled nearly half of them! It was a joke—don't you see?"

Confirmation of this came from more reliable sources. John Byerly threw down the little pistol that Wiggins had persuaded him to carry as a measure of protection, and quietly folded his arms. After a few seconds he spoke.

"Yes, Redding, I see. I see very clearly. I was to be the goat; you meant to humiliate me. Well, Redding, you needn't shake like that; I'll never be *Rio Jack* any more, and I won't hurt you without more provocation than I've got now. I'd like to thrash you, I'll admit; but I've learned control of myself, and there are women near by. Now, Redding, I'm going to make a sort of speech, and I'd rather you wouldn't be present; you make the atmosphere decidedly bad. Please take yourself and your tiny tin holdup artists away, won't you?"

They went shamefacedly. Redding was hoist on his own petard.

This last Byerly made his speech, and it was not without eloquence and a fine human appeal. He confessed everything from beginning to end, made apologies, asked forgiveness if they felt that it wouldn't cost them too much, and requested to know immediately just where he stood in the thermometer of their regard.

Old Betterton Devine stepped forward—and stopped. But the remembrance of Byerly's persecution and of Byerly's standing up under it like a true man sent him on. He set the Clearwater River aristocracy a good example by wringing the former pretender's hand most heartily.

"Speaking for myself, John," and he smiled broadly, "I'll say that the mercury in the thermometer of my regard for you is running clean out at the top!"

He faced about. "Ladies and gentlemen, what do I hear?"

What he heard was a loud clapping of hands, and to the everlasting credit of Mrs. Betterton Devine she herself touched it off. A little later, John Lord Annesley Byerly found the bay blossom girl on the lawn in the shadows near the gate. "If you hadn't asked me," she told him after he had spoken, "I—I think I'd have asked you." And he reached for her.

It was late that night when he carried the tidings to Old Top Wiggins. Old Top, torn between happiness and real grief, sat up in bed and both blessed and cursed his pal in the same breath.

"I knowed it!" he groaned. "Well, *Rio*, yuh old spavined pinto, here's good luck and a velvet trail to yuh both!"

## THE SEEKER

SO he tied up his loves in an old tump-line,  
And sealed his heart with a vow,  
And left, with a star for the only sign  
Of the way that he travels now.

At home they said he was mad to go,  
In town, that he left to his cost;  
And 'tis true—as the firs by a river know.  
But he knew when a soul is lost.

*T. Morris Longstreth.*





# A Change in the Management

By ROSE HENDERSON

LATE August sales were on, and crowds of shoppers surged around the French blouse counter, peering at price tags, fingering models, searching for guaranteed bargains. Doris Kenton stood behind the counter and shifted wearily from one aching foot to the other. Outside the air was fresh with the first hint of autumn coolness, the sunlight was ruddy with a foretaste of autumn gold. Inside the electric lights blazed, electric fans whirled, elevators rushed up and down, customers elbowed each other, clerks called to cash girls and floor walkers.

Doris spread out a beaded *crêpe de chine* and smiled mechanically at the woman opposite.

"Very lovely," drawled Doris. She was thinking of the purple haze that hung over

the Hudson when she went to work that morning. It had reminded her of Wyoming and the smoke of forest fires. It had brought a wave of homesickness, and yet she was eager to see it again. She decided that she would take the bus home even if it did cost a nickel more and take so much longer than the subway. If only to-morrow were Sunday, and she could go out to Riverside Park!

"It is a good value," the customer was deliberating.

"A remarkable value, madam. Far below what it cost us, I assure you," sighed Doris. "Very becoming, too. Looks wonderful with your hair."

Doris held the blouse against her own slim shoulders and lifted her round chin above the rose-colored folds.

"Yes, I *do* like it," admitted the customer.

"Almost the first of September," Doris was thinking. "Wonder if the old crowd 'll be camping up the cañon." Unconsciously she swept her hand over her smooth coil-fure, ruffling out the brown curls around her temples. The cañon in September! Rustling leaves, yellowing cottonwoods, rusty goldenrod. Cool nights, and a bed of pine boughs and blankets before a slow log fire. Stars blinking through the tree tops, smell of earth and cedar—

"I'll take this. Charge it, please, and I'll take it with me," the customer announced.

"Mis-ter Mi-les! Charge, please. Mis-ter Mi-les!" called Doris. She took the name and address, assured the woman again that the blouse was a wonderful value, and went in search of the elderly floor walker. It was getting near closing time. And it seemed as if a dozen female voices were shrilling "Mis-ter Mi-les!"

"Yes, Miss Kenton. Sorry to keep you waiting," said Miles when Doris finally corralled him for the perfunctory O. K. of the woman's charge.

She sank down on a divan for a minute's rest, and looked up at Miles.

"Tired to-night?" he asked.

"Oh, not specially," said Doris. She looked Miles over critically, his thin, aristocratic face, his close-cut gray hair, his perfect clothes.

She was wondering how it would seem to grow old in a department store, to live year in and year out with the crowds milling about you, with the rushing elevators, the whirring fans, the glaring lights. Always working with people and yet never knowing them. Making casual acquaintances among other clerks and cash girls and floor walkers, and then losing your drifting friendships in the city's maw of multitudes.

There was Gene Howard over in the shoe department. He and Doris had been fast friends for a time, going about together, meeting for lunch, chatting for a stolen minute or two when business slackened in the long days. Now she hadn't seen Gene to talk to him for almost a week. And when she did see him he had a moody, absent-

minded air. He was slipping out of her life again just as people were always slipping out of your life in New York.

Doris looked in a mirror and put back the rumpled brown curls around her temples. "Guess he was afraid I was falling in love with him," she said to herself with a hard smile.

Back at the counter Doris folded away blouses with skillful fingers, kept an eye on the crowd of shoppers swirling past, and dreamed over old rodeo days, old rides over hills and mountains and wide, tawny plains, old dances and moonlit trails, back in Wyoming—two years ago. Could it be only two years since she swapped Wyoming for Broadway, came to New York to go on the stage, and then didn't go!

Doris shrugged at the thought of what had come between her and that care-free Western life. First, violent ambition, theatrical employment agencies, and near starvation. Then, stubbornly waning hope, cheaper rooms, worn shoe heels, and finally the French blouse counter, receding ambition, and more food. Off to work in the morning before she was hardly awake. Crowded subway express trains, and customers, customers, *cus-tomers!* All day long. Dusting shelves and boxes, folding blouses, showing blouses, selling blouses, saying, "Yes, madam, a remarkable value. Very smart. Tremendously becoming. Looks wonderful with your hair."

Now there had been a change in the store management, and a number of the old force had left or had been discharged. Reports of the new firm's retrenchment policy had spread, with excited emphasis, among the employees. Everybody was a bit apprehensive, a little on edge. That was probably what ailed Gene, Doris was thinking. He was afraid that he might lose his job. But anyway, he needn't make that an excuse for cutting his old friends.

Somebody passed her elbow. "Night, Miss Doris," said Miles.

"Night," said Doris, smiling back at the friendliness in the floor walker's voice. It was the first time he had called her by her first name, and she liked it. It sounded like home. In Wyoming nobody called her Miss Kenton unless he were an absolute

stranger, and even then he might make it Miss Doris or Miss Dorrie. But Wyoming was different from New York.

A gong shrilled.

The final swirl of customers was eddying out the doors. Saleswomen were putting away stock and getting out night covers for counters. Cash girls were scurrying to cloak rooms. Floor men were pulling down window shades, checking up sales, shutting off electric fans. Another day was over, as far as the big department store was concerned, and the store force, old and young, great and small, was making the final spurt for aching feet, tired legs and huzzing brains. In a few minutes the carefully graded, efficiently organized body of workers would be scattered to the four winds, swelling the crowds on buses and subways and surface cars, hurrying home to furnished rooms, boarding houses or cozy apartments, according to the diverse positions on the pay roll.

Outside the mellow sunlight was softening, the blue haze was growing deeper along the river, and a faint scent of drying leaves was caught in the vagrant wind.

From the top of a careening bus Doris looked at the crowded streets without seeing them. She pulled her hat down over her eyes, fastened her neck piece close under her chin and drank in the cool air with gasps of enjoyment.

The purple mist, the yellowing leaves, the flicking wind took her back to Wyoming. Once she had ridden in the annual "Wild West" at Cheyenne. She didn't win the championship, but she came close to it. Her eyes shone as she remembered the plunging hoofs, the dust, the cheers, the whirling lariats, the smell of leather and sweating horses. Men in wide hats and khaki-colored riding clothes, women in white silk blouses and bright colored ties, and over it all, the clear, high blue of a Wyoming sky.

Yet, in spite of her dreaming over the old days, Doris did not want to leave New York. She couldn't leave, a quitter, she said to herself. But she dreaded the possibility of being turned adrift again, a detached atom in the swirling streets, a lonely, jobless hoarder in a cheap room that

she could ill afford to pay for out of scanty savings. Again she thought of Gene, and wondered what he would do if he left the store. Again her heart sank at the memory of their good times together.

## II.

THE next day was Saturday, with the usual Saturday rush. Women with children, school-teachers, suburbanites—a more mixed and hectic flood of shoppers than filled the store during the week. Doris found the Saturday crowds wearing, and yet they interested her. They revealed more of themselves than the average sophisticated buyer of expensive blouses. Often they lingered around the counter "just looking." That made some of the saleswomen furious, but Doris didn't mind. She could remember the times when she had liked to "just look," when she hadn't much money to spend, and yet enjoyed seeing what she might buy if she had more. She saw no reason for getting supercilious over the fact that you sold expensive wares.

"We put the stuff out here for folks to look at. Let 'em look," Doris would say when May Winn got snippy about customers who didn't buy anything.

"Wouldn't it be fun to have a little store with lots of just ordinary things for ordinary people," Doris had said to Gene Howard. She liked to sell to people who really needed the things they bought. She got a vicarious pleasure out of their enjoyment. And she felt sorry for women who looked longingly at her shimmering blouses and shook their heads over the prices. She hated to have to tell them that they would find something less expensive in the hase-ment.

But a little store with 'most everything in it, like one she remembered out at Laramie—a store that you could walk around in without the sense of exploring a small city. It would be reasonably quiet except at holiday times and on Saturday afternoons. There would be people coming in day after day that you would get to know; women chatting about school and youngsters, and asking you what the spring and fall styles were going to be.

"Something in pale blue? Yes, madam. A beautiful model. Awfully youthful. Very popular with young girls." Doris turned to wait on a mother and daughter. "Some of the new rose shades are good for blondes, too," she suggested, glancing at the daughter's blue eyes and yellow hair.

The girl's eyes shone at the rainbow colors Doris spread before her. And the mother finally ordered two blouses, a blue and a rose one, because the girl couldn't decide which she liked better.

"Getting her ready for college," the woman confided. "Don't know how I'll get along without her, though."

Then came a fussy woman who ordered everything out and bought nothing, a school-teacher who took a simple white crêpe, a frisk flapper who demanded Egyptian designs. So they came, young and old, rich and poor, and Doris waited on them, wistfully anxious to please. In the back of her mind was the nagging fear of dismissal, the haggard anticipation of another search for work.

At noon Doris was dizzy with fatigue. Miles stopped at the counter and asked her to go to lunch with him, and she accepted gratefully.

"Oh, thanks, Mr. Miles," she said. "How did you know that I was homesick to-day?"

In the dressing room, as she rubbed some rouge into her pale cheeks, Doris felt a sudden panic. The floor walker was being unusually kind because he was sorry for her, she decided. He knew she was going to lose her place, and he was trying to ease her disappointment. That was it. She sat down shakily as the thought came to her. Well, anyway, it was comforting to find somebody who cared enough to be sympathetic. Miles had been in the business all his life. Maybe he could help her find another place. She would sound him out and see whether he knew anything.

But at lunch Miles refused to be sounded, and finally began talking about Gene. A clean young chap, he observed, and a mighty clever salesman. He had known the boy for years—ever since he came into the store a green hand. Oh, it must have been five or six years ago. And then Miles

talked reminiscently of the old management and the old days; of the ups and downs of merchandising. He had been a silk salesman for many years, and knew all about silks from the worm to the sales counter.

Doris listened, fascinated. She had never thought about all the diverse ramifications of a big store's trade. It made her work seem a thousand times more interesting when Miles talked about it. It increased her admiration, also, for the men who directed and managed a great mercantile enterprise. What if they did fire you! They had a mighty big job, and they had to make it pay. "You're as good as a story book," she told Miles.

### III.

SHE got it that night—the slip in her pay envelope stating that her services would be no longer required; that on account of the necessity for cutting down expenses the force was being reduced; that if at any time in the future there was need for additional help, the management would be glad to have her back.

It was nicely worded. And there was further explanation that Doris did not read. She stuck the crumpled slip in her hand bag and hurried to collect her things: an extra umbrella that she kept in the locker, a book Gene had asked about and that she had brought to loan him and then didn't.

In the subway jam she nerved herself against the sense of despondency and defeat that swept over her. There was no need to get panicky, she knew that. New York was full of department stores and shops and factories. She'd find something else right away. To-morrow she would buy the Sunday papers and look up the ads. Next week she would strike right out and search the town before she had a chance to get blue and scared. Maybe she'd find something a whole lot better than she had left. Maybe she could get into one of the smaller stores where the work was less exacting.

At One Hundred and Sixteenth Street Doris left the subway and walked toward the river. She yearned for fresh air and quiet. The park was almost deserted, and

she walked on until she came to a favorite bench under a great elm tree. The river was dazzling silver beneath the lowering sun. The trees on the opposite shore were blue with haze, like the smoke of forest fires. But she wasn't thinking of Wyoming to-night. She was planning intently on staying right in New York.

"Peanuts 'n' crackerjack?" A small urchin stood beside her repeating his plaint, and Doris gave him a dime and picked two small bags of peanuts out of his basket.

The boy went on, and a saucy gray squirrel came to share her feast. Yellowing leaves drifted down from the giant elm tree. Boats whistled on the river, and buses droned along the drive above the vine-curtained wall.

Yes, she liked New York, in spite of the difficulties, in spite of the tiresome necessity of jobs and meal tickets. She recalled the plays she and Gene had gone to, the trips to Coney, their dinners at Greenwich Village tea rooms, their hikes up the river.

She brushed the saucy squirrel from her shoulder and opened the second bag of peanuts, then jumped violently at the sound of a familiar whistle.

Down the path came Gene, waving his hat and swinging along, his brown hair red in the sunshine. A sudden anger swept Doris at the sight of his nonchalance. He was coming to cheer her up, and she didn't want to be cheered up. He thought he could drop her when he pleased and then come around with crumbs of sympathy. She stiffened her tired shoulders and picked up her book and umbrella.

"Hello! Thought I'd find you here," he called. "It's the right old place to shake the dust of Keppel & Company from off your shoes."

He threw his hat on the grass and sank down beside it. "Can't you give a poor hungry tramp a peanut?" he begged.

"You can have them all. I'm going home," said Doris in a sweet, cool voice.

"Come on, don't be sore. I got it, too."

"Got what?"

"Got canned, fired, discharged, whatever term you prefer. The shoe department at Keppel & Company's is no longer eager for my services."

Gene produced a slip duplicating the crumpled one in Doris's hand bag, and smiled cheerfully up at the setting sun. "It's all right. I don't blame 'em. It's their business."

Doris sat down on the bench again and dropped her book and umbrella. Her anger vanished as suddenly as it came. "Really, Gene?" she asked, in spite of the printed evidence before her eyes. "Why, Miles was telling me just to-day what a clever salesman you are!"

"Was he, now? Well, be's a good old scout."

"He said be's known you for years, and never known a mean thing about you," Doris continued with a little flush, ashamed of her momentary hostility.

"Well, bless him! He's more than a good scout. He's a bully old chief."

"You won't have any trouble getting another place," Doris remarked. "With all your experience."

"Oh, I don't know. Never worked anywhere else. I was tired of that job, anyhow. Have a notion to go West or north or some place. Guess I got the wanderlust hearing you talk about Wyoming."

"But you know the shoe business," said Doris quickly. She didn't want Gene drifting around out West. He wouldn't like it. And he was a born salesman.

"Well, I don't know. Don't much care for this business of bein' hired and fired. Kind of imagine I'd like to do something on my own. Have a ranch or something."

"But you've only been fired once in five or six years," said Doris.

"Anyway, let's go and eat. We aren't down to peanuts yet for regular fare, I guess." He picked up the book and umbrella. "Just the volume I was wishing for, and you promised to loan it to me, too," he observed. "Why haven't you done it, kind lady?"

"You were too busy for reading, I took it," explained Doris, a touch of ice creeping into her voice.

"Well, I have been busy, all right. Busy and scared, if you want to know it. You see, I'd never been fired before, and I thought it was goin' to be something awful. I began to expect it and worry about it as

soon as the new management took us over. Now that it's actually happened, I rather like it. As I say, I was getting tired of that job, and I never would have had the nerve to kick myself out. 'Thank you kindly, sir,' she said." He pressed the printed slip to his lips and then cast it dramatically away among the yellow elm leaves. He picked up his bat on the end of the umbrella.

"Come on, let's eat," he coaxed, in his best salesman voice.

#### IV.

THEY were very jolly over their trays at the messy cafeteria; so jolly that Doris almost forgot she had lost a job that day. And when dinner was over, and Gene insisted that they take a bus ride, she was so happy that even remembering the lost job couldn't make her miserable.

Uptown along the river they jogged, cozily ensconced in a front seat with most of the bus top to themselves.

"I'm hoping maybe I can get into a smaller store where it'll be more—more home, you know," said Doris.

"That's right. You did have the idea that a small store'd be nice, didn't you? Now you see, it may be a good thing you got fired, too. You'll find out what a little old machine you were getting to be. You'll get a chance to develop your many talents."

He pinched her elbow teasingly, and Doris agreed that it might be a good thing. She was day-dreaming blissfully, sniffing the scent of withering leaves, drinking in the cool wind from the river.

"But you were so awfully different all week. I—I thought you were sore about something," she said at last.

"Me sore at you? Lord, no! I was just disgusted with myself—and then busy, too. And I hated to have you think that I couldn't make good even as a dinky shoe clerk. Let's get down here."

"Why here?"

"Just for a little walk around. River's awful pretty up this way, don't you think? And I feel as if I wanted something to drink. Better have a malted milk. You'll be getting skinny the first thing you know."

They got down and walked along a street lined with cottonwoods. There were a few houses with deep lawns and flowerbeds, between the apartment blocks. "Wouldn't it be great to live out here," said Doris, "in one of those old houses."

"Yes. But mighty expensive. They'll be tearing them down before long and building up apartments. A nice apartment out here wouldn't be bad, though."

They crossed the street, walked several blocks east, and went into a store. It wasn't a drug store, though. It was a small dry goods store, and Doris looked around wonderingly.

"It's about time you were showing up," somebody growled from behind the counter. And there stood Miles, his gray hair shining under the lights.

"Nice little store?" he asked Doris.

"Why, yes, but what are you doing out here? Is it—is it *yours*?" she gasped.

"Mine and Mr. Howard's there," said Miles, turning to where Gene was fussing over a shelf of boxes. "He can't sell anything but shoes, though. So we'll have to put in a shoe department to keep him busy. We—we're hoping you'll help us out in the blouse section. We'll have to have some just common, everyday waists out here, too. Kind of a neighborhood store, you see. But it's a nice little business. I used to work in a store like this when I was a youngster. We can build up a good trade, I'm sure. A lot of people rather come here than trail downtown if we give 'em what they want, and we can do that. Rents are a lot cheaper out here. They want good service, though. Make it a nice, refined little concern, like a specialty shop, only more stuff. Make it neat and attractive. Sell the best and sell it right."

Miles was elated with the new pride of ownership.

"Oh, Mis-ter Mi-les! I simply can't believe it. You're partners—and you want me?" Doris looked around at the neat counters, the big front windows, the grass rugs and wicker settees. There was a huge bowl of goldenrod on a stand in front of a mirror.

"Delighted to have you, and I'm sure Mr. Howard won't object. Eh, Howard?"

"Naw, you're hired, Doris," said Gene.

"Really, it's just too—wonderful," panted Doris in a shaky voice that sounded as if she were going to cry. "You tell her the details," said Miles. "I got to run out and see about some more lights. We're going to have an opening next week, Miss Doris."

"I think it's going to be all right. Miles has had a lot of all sorts of experience, and he's crazy about it," said Gene. "And it was your idea, really, so of course we couldn't do anything but take you in. You suggested it, talking about a little store. That set me thinking, and I thought it would be a timely move, considering the change down at Keppel's. I had a small inheritance I wanted to invest, and I talked the idea over with several men, but nobody seemed interested till I came to Miles. He said he'd been wanting a small business of his own for a long time. So we just went

into partnership. Nice little scheme, don't you think? And we've been so darned busy chasing around after hours, looking this place up and all. We worked out here till twelve o'clock last night. I thought it 'd be great to wait and surprise you. D'ye see the goldenrod? I got that. Thought you'd like it. And you're hired at your old salary, if you want it. First job under a brand new management."

"Oh, Gene, I love it!"

"Permanent, too, unless you resign. If you do that there's a penalty."

"Penalty?"

"Yeah. You—you got to marry the junior partner. Might you do that, Doris, dear, some time?" asked Gene, clutching both her hands. "I've loved you since the first minute I saw you."

"Well, I—of course, I might," said Doris with a tearful laugh. "But why—why wait till I resign?"

## A WORD FOR THE GROOM

EVERYWHERE we hear her praises  
 And the beauties that abide  
 In that marvel of perfection,  
 The sweet June bride.  
 But I rise to ask a question:  
 Is it folly to presume  
 If we, just in passing, mention  
 The sad old groom?

He's the man in somber clothing,  
 Like a culprit at the bar;  
 But he serves a useful purpose—  
 He hires the car.  
 In the ceremony proper  
 His is but a minor part;  
 He's a sort of needful pillar,  
 She a work of art.

All the papers laud her beauty,  
 Columns telling of her gown  
 And her rare attainments noting  
 (When she married Brown);  
 But I wish to say in passing,  
 It is neither right nor fair;  
 For there wouldn't be a wedding  
 If he wasn't there.

*Charles H. Chesley.*  
 10 A



*If your rheumatism comes on again this year—*

How can a medicine that is applied on the outside of the skin reach a pain deep down in the joints and muscles? This treatment acts by stimulating the brain to send new blood to the affected area . . .

**D**ON'T suffer unnecessary pain. Get relief at once. It may be splendidly courageous to just "grin and bear it"—but it is a frightful waste of the very vital resources you need to help you get rid of the cause of the pain.

Your doctor will tell you that pain should always be relieved—just as quickly and as completely as possible.

And this relief is easily at hand. However deep-seated, however hard to reach the pain may seem to you, it can be stopped—quickly and permanently.

Nearly fifty years ago a remedy for muscular pain was given to the world that has brought relief to so many sufferers that today you will find it in one home out of every three.

This remedy is Sloan's Liniment—probably the foremost household remedy in America, used all over the world and recommended by doctors everywhere.

No matter where the pain is, no matter how deep down in joints and muscles, it can be reached if the natural curative powers inside the body are only aroused.

When you use Sloan's, it stimulates the

nerves on the skin. They arouse the brain, which in turn causes the blood vessels to expand throughout the painful area, under the place where the liniment has been applied. Rich new blood rushes in.

This new blood coming, freshly purified, from heart and lungs, with all its marvelous germ-destroying, upbuilding powers brings to sick, pain-ridden tissues just what they need to heal them.

This is the scientifically correct way to relieve pain. It doesn't just deaden the nerves. It gives your own natural bodily defenses the aid they need to drive out the cause of pain.

Don't wait until you are in actual need. Get a bottle of Sloan's this very day, and have it on hand—35c at all druggists. Just apply it—no rubbing is necessary. It will not stain. Immediately you will feel a gentle warmth—then a pleasant tingling of the skin—then, almost magically, relief from pain. There is no burning, no blistering, only quick, lasting relief.

**SLOAN'S Liniment—Kills pain**



## Year to Pay

One dollar with coupon is all you need send. Then \$1.50 monthly—giving you a whole year's time.

This is Pattern 408

## Triple Guarantee

There is only one guaranteed Congoleum, identified by the Gold Seal shown above—in the Rugs. It protects you against dissatisfaction and gives you an unconditional money-back guarantee. Behind the Gold Seal Guarantee is our own Double Bond.

No orders filled in cities of 100,000 population or over

## 3 Rugs Free

Each small rug measures 36 x 36 inches. They match exactly the larger rug you select. While this offer lasts, we give three of these small rugs free with each large rug, all for less than the price of one.

This is Pattern 534

Choice of two Patterns on 30 Days Free Trial

# Four CONGOLEUM Rugs for Less than the Price of One \$1.00 Brings All Four

Ours is the only house in America that can make such an offer. No one else can bring you a genuine guaranteed Gold Seal Congoleum Rug, in the full 8 foot by 12 foot size, with three small rugs extra, and all for less than the regular price of the big rug alone. And on a year credit. Clip the coupon below. Write your name and address plainly. Say which pattern you want. Pay a dollar bill to it—mail it at once. We will ship immediately—on a month's trial—all 4 Congoleum Rugs—in one complete neat package. No muss, no bother, no trouble to lay, if satisfactory take a year to pay.

## The Rug of Guaranteed Wear, Year to Pay—3 Rugs FREE

Congoleum Gold Seal Art Rugs are the most popular floor covering known. They are rapidly becoming the national floor covering—highly prized in good homes for any and all rooms.

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The border background contrasts with the blue all over center by reversing the color scheme. Kiva and tan shades form border background. Accidental purpose rug, beautiful in any room.

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to see to write in name above. The number of the pattern you select. If you wish both patterns, put down both numbers—\$2 with order and \$3 monthly and get all 8 rugs.

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